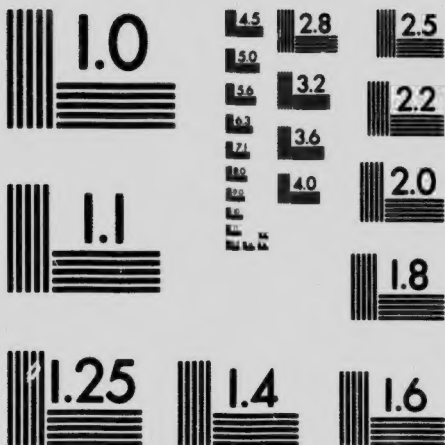




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MICHAEL CASSIDY,
R.E.

BY
"SAPPER"
AUTHOR OF
"THE LIEUTENANT AND OTHERS"



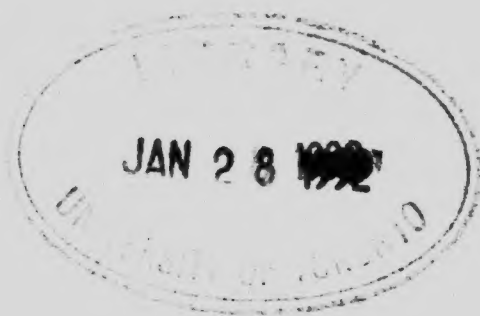
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By the Same Author

THE LIEUTENANT AND OTHERS

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PREFACE

THE following sketches were written some months ago. They concern the period when "a contemptible little army" fell back from Mons on Paris, advanced north to the Aisne, and finally arrived in Belgium to fight the first battle of Ypres.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since then: there are not many left of that original handful who crossed the water; and yet a second winter finds us in positions practically unchanged. True, the trenches have improved; the bombs are better; the guns more numerous. But the boredom and the mud, the cold and the fright, are just the same.

The stories are not chronological, and, needless to say, portray no specific individual. All are founded on fact, sketched in with a framework of imagination.

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An Incident in the Advance from Paris

CHAPTER I

THREE TO ONE

"SURE, and it's the neatest little girl I've seen this side of Connymara that you are. It's a souvenir that you're wanting? By jabers! it's a souvenir you'll have, anyway. 'Tis the correct thing the other side of the water, whichever way you go."

The resounding noise of a kiss assailed my scandalised ears, followed by rapidly retreating feminine footsteps.

"I'll be after waiting for you here to-morrow morning at the same time." Sergeant Michael Cassidy's rich Irish voice followed the invisible recipient of his souvenir as she departed; and judging by the way he leaned over the railings waving an extremely dirty pocket-handkerchief, I came to the reluctant conclusion that the lady was not only not averse to receiving souvenirs, but would in all probability return for more.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, Michael Cassidy—you with a wife and four children in Ballygoyle?" I remarked, as the handkerchief gradually became less violent.

"And what the devil—— Ah! by all the saints! 'tis you, sir." Limping and leaning heavily on a crutch, Sergeant Cassidy came towards me. "'Tis great to see you again, sir. Is it wounded you've been, or why are you not over yonder?" He waved his free arm vaguely in the direction of Wales: however his meaning was clear.

"I was abroad when it started, Cassidy, and they've caught me for Kitchener's Army." I held my cigarette case out to him.

"'Tis bad luck that," he remarked, as he lit one of my best gold-tipped cigarettes. "But bedad you'll be after getting all you want when you do get out. It's no picnic at all—what with the Black Marias, and coal boxes, and snipers."

"What's the matter with you?" I asked as we sat down.

"I stopped a bit of lead with my foot. Nothing at all: we were just putting up a bit of wire one night in a wood, and one of them snipers got an outer in my foot."

He regarded the offending member with a critical eye, and carefully deposited it on a seat.

And here, to make things clear, I must digress for a moment. Michael Cassidy is a sergeant in His Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers, to which I also have the honour to belong in the humble capacity of officer. I say humble advisedly ; for there are sergeants of many sorts and kinds, and there is Michael Cassidy, and in his presence even Brigadier-Generals have trembled. Now in the days before the exigencies of the service had taken me abroad to an abominable island given over almost exclusively to priests and goats (any one who has been condemned to soldier there will at once recognise its name)—in the days before my incarceration, then, on this dread spot, I had for some years soldiered side by side with Sergeant Cassidy. For when one's motto is " Ubique," it follows that one may live for a space with a man, and then obeying the dictates of the Great Powers that Be at the War Office, be rudely torn away from old friends and associations, whom one may never see again, and be hurled into the midst of new faces as well as new conditions. Lucky for the man who escapes the abode of goats: but that

is neither here nor there, and anyway it's all in the day's work, I suppose.

Be that as it may, the order of my release from its inhospitable shores having coincided most aptly with a regrettable midnight fracas with the local police, which incidentally is quite another story, I had shaken its dust rapidly and joyfully from my feet and sailed for home, full of war and cocktails. I had landed some ten days before, to find myself posted to a "Catch 'em Alive oh!" but withal cheery crowd of solicitors, grocers, tailors, and coalheavers, who go to make up the New Army. Chancing to wander one morning round the garden of a select London mansion, which had been put at the disposal of wounded soldiers, my eyes had been gladdened by the events which I have already chronicled, and I metaphorically fell upon the neck of my old and disreputable friend.

"And how's the old crowd getting along, Cassidy?" I asked when he was comfortably settled.

"Fine, sir, fine. 'Tis a lot of officers we've lost, though—killed and wounded." He gave a little sigh. "Do you recall young Mr.

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Trentham, him that came to us last Christmas, just before you went away?"

"I do," I answered. "I see he's wounded, in to-day's list."

"'Tis that that made me speak, sir. You remember him—quiet he was—without the necessary swallow which helps an officer to drink the healths of his men properly on Christmas Day."

I had vivid recollections of his inability to do so—but that is neither here nor there.

"Well, sir, he may not be able to drink like some of us"—I indignantly repudiated this monstrous aspersion—"he may not, I say, be able to drink like some of us, but glory be he can fight. I have not seen his equal outside Ballygoyle. You mind the manner of young gentleman he was, sir, strong as a bull, with an arm like the hind leg of an elephant. He was fair crazy to get at them, was Mr. Trentham; he couldn't stand the sort of fighting we were getting at all. 'It is not fighting,' he says to me one day, 'when you can't biff some one over the head with the butt end of a rifle once in a way.' I said to myself at the time, I said: 'May Heaven help the

Boche you do put your hands on, for he'll want all of that and more.'

"Well, one day, I misremember the name of the place we were at, but it wasn't like what it is now, all one long line—there was a chance of striking a stray Uhlan on his own, scouting, if he wasn't drunk—and when them fellows do get on the drink, you can take it from me, sir, the races at Ballygoone ain't in it. Well, Mr. Trentham and I were out one day, things being fairly quiet, and we thought we might visit one of those cafés they call them, and see if we could raise a bottle of the good. 'Tis poor stuff they have there, but we thought it was worth trying. We came along the road, and there in front of the café we were going to, we saw some horses tied up.

"'Steady,' says he to me all of a sudden; 'they aren't our horses, nor French either, unless I'm much mistaken.' At that moment out walks a man. 'Jove, Cassidy,' says he, pulling me behind a bush, 'it's Germans they are: a patrol of Uhlans.'

"'They are that, sir,' says I. 'What will we do? for not a drop will they have left in that café.'

"He thought a moment, and then a lovely

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look came over his face. 'What will we do, Cassidy?' he says. 'What do you think?'

" 'The same as you, sir,' says I.

" With that I followed him as fast as we could leg it towards that café, keeping under cover of some bushes by the road. At last we got to the place, and crept in through the back. Just as we got to the window, creeping, we were, along the side of the house, we heard a girl scream inside, followed by a roar of laughter. Mr. Trentham, he forgot the risk, straightens himself up and looks in through the window. I do the same. Mother of Heaven! 'twas awful. There was six of them in all, six of the dirty traitorous swine. They'd been drinking hard, and the old lady that kept the café was trussed up in a corner. They'd been having pot shots at her with the empty bottles. Her face was all cut, and half stunned she was. The old man was bound to the table, but they hadn't stunned him. They'd left him in the full possession of his senses that he might the better appreciate the fun. They'd got the daughter—a pretty girl, of maybe twenty—in a chair. Well, I needn't say more, but every time the poor old man tried to get to

her, they pulled the table back and roared with laughter. The swine—the cowardly swine!”

The veins were standing out in Cassidy's neck as he spoke: he was back again looking through that window. “Mr. Trentham he turns to me and mutters. ‘Three to one, Michael Cassidy, three to one,’ he says, and his face was white, saving only his eyes, and they were blood-red. ‘Three to one,’ and his voice was thick, and he shook like a man with the ague as we crept through the back door. ‘Three to one,’ he snarled as we got to the door, while his hand, that had been shaking with the fury of his passion, grew steady as a rock. For a moment we stood outside of the door, and as I looked at him I said to myself, I said, ‘You were dangerous at the window when you saw red,’ I says; ‘but by the Holy Mother a regiment of Uhlans wouldn’t stop you now.’ And then we went in. ‘Twas great, oh! ’twas great. They stood there, that six—gaping, they were. Then one of them muttered ‘English.’ Then I saw Mr. Trentham go in. Oh! ’twas an education—a dream. And then I lost sight of him in the box-up. I got home on one of their heads

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with my rifle belt, and split it like a pumpkin. My backhander hit the lamp, and spoilt the next one, but it reached his face, and it was enough for him. And then I saw one getting out of the door. I caught him in the garden: he will not play that game again. When I got back I found everything was silent, saving only the poor old woman moaning in the corner. It was an awful sight. Mr. Trentham, he'd swung two of them together, and cracked both their skulls. They was dead as mutton. The other one he'd got at with his hands.

"'Is there any more of them, Michael Cassidy?' he says.

"'There is not, sir,' says I. 'They are all dead, the devils, and their horses are without.'

"'Twas a great blow that first one of yours,' he says.

"'It felt good, sir,' says I. "'Tis a blow we use at Ballygoyle with empty bottles on race days.'

"While we'd been speaking we'd untied the old man and the old lady, but the poor girl she just lay there dazed and sick. 'Twas awful, the room. You've never seen such a

shambles in your life, sir—oh ! 'twas fearful. We pulled out the dead Germans, and threw them into the wood, and then we cleared up the mess as best we could. We left them there, the three of them, the poor old man trying to comfort his old wife, and the pair of them weeping by the daughter. Ah ! the devils, the swine : to think of it. It might have been one's own girl, sir ; and the look in her eyes—I'll never forget it."

" But you killed the lot, Cassidy. That's the main point : you killed the brutes," I cried excitedly.

" And is not one officer of the British Army and one sergeant sufficient for six Germans when it comes to that sort of work, especially when the officer is such as Mr. Trentham ? " he answered with dignity.

He did not add a like comparison for the sergeant.

I admired him for it.

A Farm near Bailleul, December 1914

CHAPTER II

A FIRE IN BILLETS

"'Tis a fine body of men that they are," remarked Sergeant Cassidy to me, as I sat with him one day in the house where he was slowly recovering from the wound in his foot, which had caused his temporary absence from the plains of Flanders. As he spoke his eyes followed the fire engine, drawn by two grey and white horses, disappearing in the distance. The bell was still clanging faintly, as he absent-mindedly felt in his pocket, to find that as usual he'd left his cigarettes upstairs.

"'Tis a fine body of men that they are," he remarked again, as he took one of mine. "But, by jabers! sir, seeing them going up the street there, brings to my mind the last fire that I was present at, over yonder." On this occasion he indicated Northumberland with a large hand; but, no matter.

"You'll mind," he went on after a reflective

pause, " that those farms over the water are not what you would call the equals of Buckingham Palace for comfort. The majority of them are built in the same manner all over the country, and when you've seen one you've seen the lot. There's the farm itself, in which reside the owners and the officers. The officers have a room to themselves, but in these farms all the rooms lead into one another. Mr. Tracey—you mind him, sir, the officer with the spectacles, fat he was—he was powerful set on washing, which is not to be encouraged in that trying weather ; and he was rendered extremely irritated by the habit of the ladies of the farm, who would walk through the room when he was in his bath.

" I mind one morning, perishing cold it was, when I came up to the kitchen to see him, and I looked through the door. Two of the old women of the farm were in the room, and they'd left both the doors open, while they had a bit of a set-to about something. Poor Mr. Tracey was sitting in his bath, shouting at them to go out of the room and shut the door. He'd lost his spectacles, and his towel had fallen in the bath, and the draught was

causing him great uneasiness. 'Twas a terrible example of the dangers of washing in those parts."

Sergeant Cassidy shook his head reflectively.

"Still," he continued after a moment, "'twas of the farms I was speaking. They have most of them two barns which run perpendicular to the farmhouse, so that the three buildings enclose a sort of square yard in the middle of them. The barns are full of straw and hay and the like, and there it is that the men sleep, though 'tis well to climb up to the loft, and not to remain on the ground floor. The reason will be clear to you. These folks are very partial to pigs and hens and cows, and they are not particular where the animals go at night. When therefore I was roused from my sleep on one occasion by a fearful yell from below, I was not surprised.

"'Mother of Heaven! 'tis the Germans,' says the man next to me, hunting for his gun.

"'Tis nothing of the sort,' I says, as I looked through the loft. "'Tis the pig, going to bed, and she has sat on the face of Angus MacNab.'

" 'The dirty beast has sat on me face,' cried MacNab, as he saw me.

" 'Then 'tis the pig I'm concerned about,' says I, and I went back to my blankets. I have no patience with them Scotchmen."

Sergeant Cassidy again availed himself of my cigarette case. "But where does the fire come in, Cassidy?" I asked, as he lit up.

"I am just coming to that, sir. As you can imagine, the soldier will not stop his smoking because he is in the middle of hay and straw. It is too much to ask of any man. There are strict orders about it, of course, but—well, an officer like you will understand, sir. One day—it was about eleven o'clock in the morning—one of the men says to me, 'Look at the barn.'

" ' 'Tis Fred,' I cried, and there was smoke coming out at the top of the thatching. 'Run, ye blackguards, run. It's water and buckets we'll be wanting.'

"The first man in was the dirty schemer O'Toole, him that had been excused duty that very morning by the doctor for gout in the foot.

" 'I have my bull's-eyes saved,' he says to me as I came up.

" 'You flat-faced malingerer,' says I, 'you have fatigues for a month as well.'

"And then the officers came out. "'Tis fired, it is,' I says to the Major. Do you recall the Major, sir. A terrible sarcastic man he was—with an eyeglass.

"He puts it in his eye as I spoke. 'I didn't imagine the damn'd thing was frost-bitten,' he says. 'Who's the fool who did it?'

"Then the boys got the water going. We had a ladder placed up to the loft, and we handed the buckets up to the men above. The lads kept a chain of full buckets on the move from hand to hand. But it was hopeless from the start.

" 'Get the animals out, boys,' I shouts.

"Then the fun began. The old women were out wringing their hands and weeping, and the old farmer was shouting to the interpreter, with a little pig under each arm. The interpreter goes up to the Major, and tells him that the farmer said there was a fire-engine in the village. So the Major he sends off one of the officers to get it. Meantime

one of the pigs had knocked down the old women, and then got entangled in their skirts. When that little box-up came to rest in the middle of the refuse pit, the skirts were on the pig. Oh! 'twas great. The fair at Ballygoyle was not in it. Then Mr. Tracey he climbs up the ladder to the loft, and gets an empty bucket in the chest, as they threw it out.

“ ‘ ’Tis hopeless, sir,’ he says to the Major when he could again speak, for the wind he had lost.

“ So the Major orders all the men out of the barn, and we started pouring water on the house to keep it from spreading. And then after about an hour the fire-engine arrived. 'Twas the most amazing contraption you ever did see. 'Twas an old tub on two wheels, with a hand-pump attached, and it had been brought by three old gentlemen with grey hair—one of them with a wooden leg. 'Twas the local fire brigade—the rest had gone to the war. The old man with the wooden leg took on something terrible. He hopped about crying ‘Oh! Oh!’ and we thought he was hurt till the interpreter said he wanted the tub filled with water. Just as we had it filled

the old pig knocked it over, and we had to fill it again. A terrible machine it was ! When it was filled, those of the lads who could speak for laughter started to pump, while one of the old gentlemen took the nozzle, and climbed up the roof of the farmhouse, that he might the better direct the water. He had his thumb over the end of the nozzle to get the pressure up, and 'twas a powerful thumb he had, for the hose burst near the Major, and the water took him in the stomach. The lads were pumping with a will, and in stepping back the Major overbalanced and fell into the refuse pit in the centre of the courtyard. Oh ! a terrible sight he was as he got up. All the men spent the afternoon looking for his eyeglass. And then the old gentleman on the roof was overcome by the heat, and fell off, and was only saved from destruction by going into a tub of pig-wash. 'Twas a great diversion, as, having his head downwards, he was nearly drowned."

I could stand it no more, so I rose to go. "Were the people compensated, Cassidy?" I asked.

"They will be, sir," he answered, "they

will be—though it's my own belief the old ruffian of a farmer set light to it himself. 'Twas poor hay that he had, and he will be paid as if 'twas best quality."

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CHAPTER III

MEDICAL INSPECTION

THE other morning was not one of my best. Somehow in the days of peace I had always laboured under the delusion that, if ever we did go to war, we should at any rate enter simultaneously into an era when the ordnance cease from troubling and the doctors are at rest. So having found how great the delusion really was, my heart yearned for Sergeant Cassidy. His views on life in general, especially with regard to those branches of the Service whose mission in life is the annoyance of everyone else, would, I thought, be as balm to my anguished soul.

I found him in bed. His foot had relapsed. "Cassidy," I said, as I handed him my cigarette case, "I am in trouble. A doctor has just inspected us, and was very put out to find the ration meat for the men floating in the soak-pit of a neighbouring ablution bench.

It was not put there by my instructions, as I told him, but he was unappeasable. Again, a Board Inventory, the property of the Army Service Corps, has been defaced, in that false figures have been added by some person or persons unknown. Personally I suspect the solicitor, who is at present loing cook-mate, of having feloniously inserted the figures 94 opposite the item 'Shovels, coal, ordinary. Mark 6A.' We have not, as you know, got 94 shovels, coal, ordinary, Mark 6a. We haven't got one. It has been lost, and personally I again suspect the solicitor: but the stout gentleman who was making his weekly or yearly inspection has already reported it to the Army Council. He gave me to understand that if we do lose the war, it will probably be owing to that Inventory Board." I sighed deeply and relapsed into silence.

" 'Tis always the same, sir," he answered kindly: I needed sympathy. " 'Tis always the same. The great thing is to discover their little weaknesses before they come round to see one. Of course the circumstances you mention are peculiar. I doubt me that, even had you discovered their peculiarities, so to speak, you would have escaped entirely—for

as you say, sir, the soak-pit is no place for the meat to rest in at all. Still, 'tis a most important thing, and should be looked into on all occasions of that nature.

"I mind me now of a thing which took place some fortnight before I got the little souvenir in my foot. We were in billets; 'twas the billet of which I have already spoken, where the barn was burnt down. One day the doctor comes to me and says, 'Cassidy,' he says, 'it's inspected we'll be.'

"'Tis not the first time that same thing has happened,' says I, 'and we will survive. Do not be uneasy, sir. 'Twill be all right.'

"I should tell you that our doctor was not a soldier at all: one of those civilians, he was, who came in at the beginning. His principal duty when we was resting in billets was the rationing of food and drink for the officers, and which same game, so I heard, he was hard to beat. One of them gentlemen who has a way with him: he would coax a bottle of the stuff out of a lime-kiln, and most of them cafés were worse than that after the boys had been there for a bit. A cheery gentleman he was, who always got

mistakes in his returns. You mind them returns, sir—in triplicate they are generally, and he could not abide them same. Oh! there was a terrible box-up when he made a mistake on one occasion, and mixed up the number of orderlies that he had with the number of men that had been inoculated for the enteric. For he had but two orderlies, and one hundred and sixty of the boys had the inoculation taken.

“Of course he was not used to inspections, but I told him ’twould be all right. ’Twas the chief of all the doctors was coming, he said, and as he always got his returns wrong, he was anxious that all should be well. So we went round together, and he poked his nose into all the places where the men slept, and the cook-houses, and the like. I turned them on to the cleaning up, and soon the smell was not quite so bad as usual. We had everything ready the night before, and the men had knocked off, when the doctor comes to me in a terrible state.

“‘Cassidy,’ he says, ‘we have the bath forgot.’

“‘Bath,’ says I, ‘what will we be wanting with a bath? Have not the boys their

buckets? And it is not the Hotel Cecil that we have.'

" 'Cassidy,' he says, 'the chief doctor is the devil on a bath for the men. That and a tub in which to wash their clothes we must have, or it's lost I am. I heard just now 'twas the first thing he'd look for.'

" 'Bedad,' says I, 'if 'tis the peculiarity of the chief doctor we will get a bath, or my name is not Michael Cassidy.—O'Toole,' I shouts, 'you lazy blatherer, I'm wanting you.' 'Twas the scheming malingerer that had been excused duty for the gout in the foot, and had us all beat when we ran to the burning barn, to save his peppermint bull's-eyes. You mind I told you of that same O'Toole. I says when he comes, 'Hunt round and find a bath.'

" 'A bath!' says he, 'and where will I be finding that same?'

" 'Is it me that would be saving you that trouble?' I cries. 'The doctor wishes a bath; do not let me see your ugly face till you have one found.'

" 'I'm thinking,' says I, when he had gone, 'that if we cannot get a bath, it is a hole we might dig in the field, and line it with the waterproof sheets. They did that same, the

squadron in the next farm, but owing to the difficulty of seeing which was hole and which was not when they had it filled with the water, the old sow fell in at the same time as the sergeant-major, and there was a terrible commotion.'

" "'Tis something better we must have, Cassidy,' he says. 'The chief doctor is a terrible man, and he has it against me that I told him in triplicate that I had one hundred and sixty orderlies.'

" At that moment back comes O'Toole. 'I have it found,' he cries. 'There is a big tub yonder of metal, that they use for the pig-wash, and empty it is.'

" 'It will serve,' says I when I see it. 'Can ye paint, O'Toole?'

" 'I can that,' he says.

" 'There is a man with some whitewash,' I says, 'painting the farm. Get that same and write BATH upon that tub.'

" 'But the wash-tub,' cries the doctor. 'We have it forgot.'

" 'Is there another of them tubs, O'Toole?' I says.

" 'There is not,' he says. 'I have the farm searched.'

“ ‘What will we do?’ cried the doctor. ‘The chief doctor is a devil for wash-tubs; and, Cassidy,’ he says coaxingly, ‘there’s that matter of the orderlies.’ Oh! he had a way with him, had the doctor.

“ ‘ ’Tis not I that will be failing you,’ I cries, and I thinks for a moment. I looks at the tub, and then sudden-like I gets the idea.

“ ‘ ’Tis big enough,’ I says, ‘ ’tis plenty big. O’Tcole,’ I cries, ‘O’Toole, ye blackguard, you will paint BATH as I have told you on this side of that tub, and on the other you will paint WASH-TUB. Do you follow me, O’Toole?’

“ ‘I do that,’ he says, and goes off for the whitewash.

“ The doctor was gazing at me. ‘What is the notion?’ he says, ‘for the chief doctor will not be deceived.’

“ ‘Leave it to me, sir,’ I says: ‘leave it to me,’ for I had the scheme in my mind.

“ The next day I sent for O’Toole. ‘You have it marked,’ I says. ‘That is good. Now listen while I tell you, you dirty malingerer. The chief doctor is inspecting us this day, and the devil he is on baths and wash-tubs. You will place the tub against the wall

in the barn with the word BATH outwards. The chief doctor is coming at eleven, but it's late he may be. On the other hand he may be early. So at a quarter to eleven you will remove your clothes, and stand by the bath.'

" 'But, Sergeant!' he says.

" 'There is no but,' says I. 'When the chief doctor appears you will receive the signal from Angus MacNab, who will be at the door, and you will get into the water. You will get into the water, I say, and when the chief doctor comes in at the door you will pretend that you like it.'

" 'But it's dead I shall be!' he cries.

" ' 'Twill be no loss,' says I. Then I sends for six of the boys. 'The chief doctor is coming,' I says, 'and the devil he is on baths and wash-tubs. I have the bath fixed for O'Toole; but when I shall give the signal for which you will watch, you will rush in and seize the tub and carry it round to the other side of the barn, and put it against the wall with WASH-TUB showing. I will see the chief doctor goes round the other way; then when he appears you will be washing your socks. There will be water in it from the bath of O'Toole.'

" 'Tis only one pair of socks that I have,' says one.

" 'Then 'tis high time they were washed,' says I. 'Be off, you blackguards, and may Heaven help you if you have the doctor let down.'

" At eleven-thirty the chief doctor arrives. 'Tis the bath I would see,' he says.

" 'Tis occupied, sir,' says I, giving the sign to Angus MacNab. 'Twas high time too, for O'Toole had been dressed only in his shirt for three-quarters of an hour.'

" When we got to the barn there was O'Toole standing in the water. He was blue with the cold, and shivering like a leaf in the wind.

" 'Ah! my man,' says the chief doctor, 'tis a bath you're having, I see.'

" 'Sit down, you varmint,' I whispers, 'sit down and splash. It's enjoying yourself you are.'

" 'And how often do you take a bath?' says the chief doctor.

" 'Every day,' mutters O'Toole, when he could speak for the chattering of his teeth, for I had my eye fixed upon him.

" 'Very good indeed,' says the chief

doctor. 'A most satisfactory arrangement,' he remarks to our own doctor. 'And now I will inspect the place where they have the clothes washed.'

"'Get out,' I says to O'Toole as they goes out.

"' 'Tis dying I am,' he says, as the six men rushes in for the tub.

"'Step it, you blackguards!' I cries. 'I will keep them diverted till you have it in place.'

"With that I catches up the party, and asks the Colonel concerning one of the cook-houses near by. The doctor keeps him occupied inside, I having given him the wink, and then out come the boys with the tub. They stuck going round, as the passage was narrow, but I had them fixed with my eye, and they suddenly fell through together. The tub upset and the water was received by Angus MacNab. There was a terrible noise as it fell on the bricks, but they was out of sight when the doctor appeared.

"'And now the wash-tub,' he says.

"'Round here, sir,' says I, and with that I leads the party to the other side of the barn. They had it fixed, as he comes up.

"'But it is empty,' says he. 'You can-

not wash clothes without water. And what is that at the bottom ?'

"He pointed to a watery-looking grey object at the bottom of the tub.

" ' 'Tis the shirt of O'Toole,' whispers one of the men to me, ' that slipped in by mistake.'

" ' 'Tis a shirt,' says I, ' the owner of which has been in contact with a horse with the ringworm.' At that moment I heard the voice of O'Toole from inside as he looked for his shirt, and I went on a little louder, the better to drown his horrible language. 'I have the men instructed that they are to empty the water away after washing any of his garments.'

" ' But why does he not wash his own ?' asks the Colonel.

" ' In this unit, sir,' says I, ' the medical officer is that particular that we has a special squad trained in washing.'

" ' Indeed,' says he, and looked at me close. 'Twas a mercy he did not look at our own doctor, for he was purple in the face, and unable to speak with ease. 'Indeed,' says he, and fixes his eye on the one sock which was all the whole six could muster between

them for the washing. 'I trust they are not overworked.'

"I have since wondered whether he suspected anything," murmured Cassidy, as he took another of my cigarettes.

I left the great man smoking reflectively, and as I reached the front door the sense of my great inferiority descended like a pall. What would he have done had the meat been found in the soak-pit? But at this moment I was nearly run over by a motor omnibus.

CHAPTER IV

THE GUARDS

As I strolled into the house one morning where Sergeant Michael Cassidy was recovering from the wound in his foot, I found a subdued air of bustle and confusion.

"And what is up this morning, sister?" I asked. "You seem very busy."

"He wishes to go for a drive," she said.

I smiled, and asked the unnecessary question. There being some twenty other wounded in the house, to the casual observer the question as to who wished to go for a drive might not appear unnecessary; but then the casual observer does not know Cassidy. Receiving, as I had anticipated, an amazed: "Why, Sergeant Cassidy, of course," I thoughtfully left her to lay down the necessary red carpet on the steps, and wended my way upstairs to his room.

I found the great man in a gracious mood.

"Ah! 'tis yourself, sir," he said, as I came in. "And it's pleased to see you that I am."

"I hear you're going for a drive, Cassidy," I remarked, as he held out his hand for my cigarette case. "I rather think I'll come with you—unless," I hastened to add, "any beautiful lady wishes for the privilege."

"No," he answered, "no; I was going alone, and it's delighted I shall be if you will come."

And so it happened that in a few minutes we were rolling smoothly towards Regent's Park. It was at the entrance by Sussex Place, as far as I can remember, that he suddenly blew a delighted kiss to a lady standing on the pavement, whom I recognised, to my horror, as the wife of a well-known sporting peer.

"Cassidy," I said, "for Heaven's sake, what are you doing?" I clutched his arm. "Do you know who that was?"

"I do not," he said. "But she was a decent enough looking little filly, and would I not be blowing her a kiss?" He dismissed this untoward incident with a wave of the hand, and sat back majestically in the car.

The next instant he sat up with a jerk. "Glory be, sir," he said, "and what is that that I see?"

I followed the direction of his eyes, and saw, that at present familiar sight to all Londoners, a line of men in wonderful garments, bowlers, flannel trousers, scarlet tunics, brown brogue shoes, and the like, advancing a few paces, then laying down, and finally charging the road with hoarse and horrible noises.

"It is Kitchener's Army training," I said.

"The saints be praised," he remarked.

"Seeing them without any uniform, I thought that likely enough some scheming blackguard had hopped it with their money, and that sort of row is one I am not willing to miss."

He watched them closely as, the charge over, they closed up on the road to listen to the words of wisdom of their platoon commander.

"Indeed," he went on after a moment, "'tis Kitchener's Army they are! And a likely-looking lot of boys, or my name is not Michael Cassidy. But tell me, sir," he turned to me, "are they allowed to dig in the grass here?"

I told him that I really wasn't certain whether they were actually allowed to dig in

the Park itself, but that they anyway did it elsewhere.

"That is good," he said. "You must mind, sir, that the war over yonder is different to what you and I were brought up to. What we have just seen is good: 'tis undoubtedly good that the foot soldiers should be able to run and lie down the like we have been after looking at; but it is by no manner of speaking all. And it is the other great part of their training that I would not see left out, for, begorrah, 'tis the most important."

"You mean the digging, Cassidy?" I asked.

"I mean that same, sir. I would march those lads miles and miles till they were fit to drop, and when they were so tired that they were unable to wish for anything—not even beer—I would say to them, 'Dig, you blackguards, dig yourselves in, and I will give you an hour to do that same in. And if I find any man who has made but a scratch in the ground, I will be upon him and he will be sorry that he was ever born. You are to go down four feet or four feet six, and you shall not rest till you have it done.' Then, when I had seen them do it, I would say to

them, 'That is what you will do over yonder, only then it will not be in the daylight; 'twill be at night, and we will practise that same every day for the next month. It is that," he continued, "that made those fellows the devils," and with a large hand he indicated the Zoo.

"Which fellows?" I asked, a little bewildered.

"Those Guards," he answered. "It is there that they live, is it not? though it seems a strange place for those smart gentlemen."

"They have moved into the Cavalry Barracks lately," I answered mildly, "but they are not far from here."

"I knew they were somewhere in these parks," he remarked. "And you say they are cavalry?"

"The particular barracks in Regent's Park are cavalry ones," I told him.

"Is that so?" he said, as he lit another of my cigarettes. "Well, of those Cavalry Guards I cannot speak. They have not, up to date, served with me personally." He paused in thought.

"Oh! you haven't been with them out

there?" I asked, as his attention wandered to a nursemaid on the path.

"That is correct, sir," he returned, when the perambulator had vanished. "They have not been with me out there; but I have heard tell that they are equally devils. But it is of those Foot Guards that I would tell you, for I have not seen their equals in a fight outside of Ballygoyle. I mind me once, when I was in these parts before, I was standing in one of those crowded streets, when I heard the sound of a band, and coming along the road was a company of those fellows. 'Twas a dream to watch them, they were so smart; and I was just thinking that I myself could not have walked better than the man with the stick at the head, when a little rat of a man standing beside me, said to me all of a sudden, he says, 'And what is the use of those fellows? Dressed-up dolls, I call them, and that's what I and the likes of me have to pay for. Soldiers like you,' he says to me, 'we do not mind, but those——' and he spat in the gutter.

"'Ye dirty little beast,' I says to him, 'is it a drink you're wanting with your flattery? With a face like yours, whatever

clothes you were after putting on, it is not a doll you would resemble, but a walking pimple; and as for paying, you have never paid for anything yet in your life unless you could not steal it,' and with that I put him in the gutter too.

"But it is an undoubted fact, sir," he continued, "that those fellows were not with a certain class of the people too popular. They are always about with His Majesty the King—the saints preserve him—and, as I say, a certain class of the people think that they cannot fight, because they are too grand to do that same. Well—they are wrong," and with an air of finality Cassidy smiled at three complete strangers of the female sex.

"You mind, sir," he continued after a moment, "that, as I told you, the war is different to what you and I were brought up to expect. Take our own work, for instance. Since we have been up in the North, 'tis entirely at night that we have been used. The foot soldiers are in the trenches, and the Germans are in their trenches, so close that they are able to wish one another the top of the morning. But as those Germans, when they were making an endeavour to break

through our lines, were not in the habit of ringing a bell before they started, it was necessary to put up a halting-place where they might gain breath, the better to attack. That they should stop there, because they could not get through the wire, was not our fault, and if they were killed, well, what could they expect with the range but ten or fifteen yards? I mind me one morning I was in the trenches, and when the dawn broke 'twas an ugly sight. There must have been a hundred of them dead on the wire we had put up the night before. One of them was facing me, so close that I could almost touch him.

"He had the wire-cutters in his right hand, and it was stretched above his head. He was lying on the apron of the wire, and his head was twisted, and he was grinning. His legs was all twisted, and he still held his rifle in his left hand. And he went on grinning, until I was after shouting at him to turn his face away. And one of those Foot Guards sergeants he says to me, he says, 'Tis not a pleasant sight,' he says. 'It's alive he might be, and the bully beef is uncommon hard on the stomach for the contemplation of him.' 'I have a wife,' I said to him, 'a wife and

four kiddies in Ballygoyle, and it's thinking I am that that man there may have the same. What would she say if she were to see that grin? Ah! for the Holy Mother's sake, turn your face away,' I muttered, for my nerves were a bit upset, and I could not take my eyes from that grin. And then he slips down—quietly like, all of a sudden, and as he slipped his chin caught in one of the wires, and his head went back, and he stopped his grinning.

"But 'twas the Guards I was after speaking to you of." Cassidy became cheerful again. "It will be clear to you, sir," he said, "that when one is putting up that same wire in front of those trenches, it makes a power of difference who it is that is behind. For some of those lads—especially those recruits who had come out to replace the casualties—were a bit jumpy: and in the habit of loosing off into the night without due consideration of the consequences. It is just as easy to be killed from behind, when one is on the top of the ground working between the trenches, as it is to be killed from in front. I remember me one night when that flat-footed malingerer O'Toole of whom I have already spoken to

you, missed the picket with his maul, and hit the foot of Angus MacNab. 'Twas a fearful howl that rent the night, and the Germans thought that it was attacking we were. So they started to fire. 'Lie down,' I screams as our own fellows fired too, 'or it's shot we shall be.' And there we lie for half an hour, while they shot over our heads. 'Twas a mercy no one was hit; though 'twas the language of MacNab that had us saved. He had thrown himself down when I shouted, and his face met some bully beef which had walked out of the trenches on its own. That and his foot combined raised the tone of his conversation, and deflected those bullets.

"But as you know, sir," he went on, "when we are working we have not the time to fire even if we are attacked. It is therefore desirable to get, if the infantry will arrange it, a covering party, which will give the warning if the Germans are coming. But the infantry were having a terrible time. They were being shelled all day and half the night, and 'twas sometimes a little difficult to get that same covering party. For it meant, as you will see, going even nearer to the Germans than we were, and in addition to that it meant coming

out of the trenches where they felt they were, in a manner of speaking, safe. It was necessary to use a little persuasion at times, and sometimes even we worked without them at all.

"But one night, I mind me, we were to work in front of the Guards. When we arrived, at about ten of the clock, Mr. Trentham was with us in command, and he crept along the trench with me to find the officer. 'Is it wiring you are?' he says, when we found him. 'We'll have a drop of the old and bold, while I arrange for the party to cover you as you work.' And with that he went out, and we each had a drop of the stuff, which same, I remember me, was the proper goods. Then he came back and said, "'Tis all arranged, and I have the men told that you are doing the dirty in front, and they will not fire until I tell them.' Mr. Trentham and I, we looked at one another, and 'twas the same thought in both our minds: 'If 'twas always like that how easy it would be!' The covering party ready at once, and offered without the asking: the splendid discipline of it all! For those men behind us would have died sooner than fire without the further orders. Mind you, sir,

there are many other regiments the same, but 'tis unfair to my manner of thinking that any one should say those Guards are for show alone. And I says, and I'd like to meet the man that would deny me, that the discipline in those fellows is simply amazing."

"But where does the digging come in, Cassidy?" I asked.

"'Tis another story, that, sir," he answered, "but 'tis all part of the same thing—the discipline. You'll mind, that when men have been fighting hard, or when they have been marching, and it is all over for the time, the first thought of those men is to lie down and go to sleep. They are done to the world, they are dead beat, and more often than not it is at night. I am speaking of the thing as it was some month or two ago. The men are there—the position is new—and they cannot see ten yards in front of them. There is no officer at hand, maybe, and they just lie down and go to sleep. Now, sir, that will not do at all. 'Tis fatal. The morning comes, and those coal boxes start again, and the men are in the open. Even if they are not hit, they get a bit jumpy in a manner of speaking, for those contraptions are ugly things to

watch, bursting all round you. They get jumpy, I say, and perhaps one comes a bit nearer than the rest, and somebody mutters 'Let's hop it.' 'Tis not a thing which we would wish to speak of, sir, but you know as well as I that those things happen even in the finest army of the world. Had those same lads been made to dig themselves in—right in, not a blithering little hole . . . hatched in the mud, but down four foot or more, when they got there the night previous, some of those things which I have seen, and of which same I would rather not speak, would not have happened at all. But 'tis discipline that is needed to make a man dig when he is beat to the world, and there is no regiment in the Army that has the Guards beat at it. Some are as good, but there is none that has them beat. Those fellows have not yet run, that I knows of: they have not budged one inch from the places where they were put, and there are regiments that cannot say that same. And I puts it down to the making the men dig themselves in, to a great extent—to the discipline that makes the man not skimp his work because the officer is not behind him with a stick. You will understand, sir, when i say

run I do not mean that any one has hopped it bad : at least, glory be, I have not seen that same. But 'tis just that hopping it for a quarter of a mile or so and losing the advantage that you had won overnight, for the want of the digging, that sometimes occurred, before the importance of that same digging was understood properly ; and it's there those Guards were so good, and it's that which those fellows who are now training should have shooed into their heads."

"I think that lesson has been well learned," I said as he stopped.

"Sir," he answered seriously, "it cannot be learned too well, "for 'tis a matter of life and death."

CHAPTER V

A SUBALTERN OF THE GUARDS

SLOWLY the car glided past Wellington Barracks, and as we passed one of the entrances three young officers came out.

“Good lads they are,” cried Cassidy, “with that swagger which is right and fitting. For as you know, sir, if there is one thing which the boys cannot abide, it is the officer who creeps about like a cheese mite. They have their faults, those lads, but they are faults on the right side. I mind me now of a story I heard out yonder. They’d suffered, those Guard regiments, lost something cruel, as you know; and the young gentlemen from home were coming out to replace the casualties. Well, as you can imagine, sir, ’tis an uneasy matter at times for a young lad, fresh to the game, to find himself with old soldiers who have him watched, to see what manner of lad he is when the Marias are about. And

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'tis the fear of being afraid that makes their hands tremble a bit, and gives them a touch of sweat on the forehead though the day would kill a polar bear with the cold. 'Tis the fear of being afraid of which those lads are afraid. One of those young lads—a proper thoroughbred he was—came out, and found himself in a trench, with the lads with their eyes on him.

“ ‘ ’Tis afraid they think me,’ he says to himself. ‘I’ll show ’em, the blighters. So he stepped out of the trench, as pleasant as may be, as if to take the air. ‘Come in, sir,’ begs the sergeant—‘ ’tis death outside.’ ‘Seems quite a healthy sort of death, sergeant,’ says he, as nice as you like, and as he was speaking he took it. Luckily for him ’twas only a flesh wound, in such a place that he could not sit down with ease. The men they roared with laughter, and the sergeant smiled; and at that moment along creeps the captain. ‘ ’Tis wounded I am, sir,’ says the subaltern. ‘Bad luck,’ says the captain; ‘and where have you taken it?’ ‘Where it will hinder the easy use of the firing step to sit on,’ says the subaltern. ‘And how the devil did you take it there?’ says the cap-

tain. 'Was it out of the trench you were?' 'I was that,' he says—'taking the air.' The captain looked at the sergeant and saw him smile, and the captain looked at the men and saw them with their hands to their mouths studying the view. 'You cannot with ease sit upon the step,' he said. 'Can you with ease accompany me a little distance down the trench? And you will come as well, sergeant,' he says, 'for I'm minded to discuss this question of taking the air.' When they were away from the men he said to the sergeant, 'Did you tell the officer the air was unhealthy a few feet higher up?' 'I did that, sir,' said the sergeant. 'All right,' he said, 'that will do.' The sergeant backed away a few paces, and then the captain started. 'Mr. So-and-so,' he started—I misremember the gentleman's name—'have you made any mistake? You aren't by any means under the delusion that you are out here to practise open-air pastoral dances, are you? You aren't qualifying for an instructor in Swedish exercises by any chance, are you?' 'No, sir,' said the little officer, looking all bewildered like. 'Then what the blazes do you mean by behaving like an organ grinder's

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monkey and getting out of that trench?' he roared. 'Twas to show them I was not afraid,' says the little 'un, standing bolt upright and looking him straight in the face. The captain's eyes they twinkled, and he looked away that the lad might not see; then he turned back. 'The officers in our regiment,' he said, 'are never afraid. Let us not be mistaken,' he said. 'When you come to me as my subaltern, I want you alive and well. It is your job to keep yourself fit, and not get wounded. If I told you to lead the men over that ground there,' and he pointed to the German trenches, 'and you refused or hesitated, though 'twould be certain death you went to, I would blow your brains out if you could not blow them out yourself. But I did not tell you to give an imitation of a skirt dance at the Alhambra merely to show that you possessed what you should blow your brains out for if you didn't. It's taught you a lesson, my lad, and a damned good one. Take him away,' he said to the sergeant, 'and have it dressed. If he can't sit down, he must lie on his face.' The lad was nigh faint with the blood he had lost, but he stood up and he said, 'I'm sorry, sir: I

was a fool.' 'You were, my lad,' said the captain; but as he went back to the trench past the sergeant, he said to him, 'They're the sort of fool we can do with, though, aren't they?'

"A thoroughbred lot they are," continued Cassidy, after a pause, "with their eyeglasses, and hair-oil, and the like. Hampers they have from the big shops, they tell me, with bottles of the stuff inside. And the talking of those same bottles reminds me of another story about those same Guards." He paused reminiscently as a huge and majestic policeman barred our way.

"The lad in blue," he went on after a moment, "he over yonder hiding the 'bus, is about the same size, from all I've heard, as one of the German officers that fell into the trenches the other night. They were our Guards in them, and if I am not mistaken the fat one was of the Prussian Guard. 'Twas in the days two months ago, when they were trying to break the line. They got right up to our trenches, the devils, and jumped in, and there was a grand box-up. The fat lad stood on the side before getting in, and the earth gave way, so he got in unexpected

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like, and fell upon one of the young officer gentlemen. Well, as was natural, there was a great box-up, and the fighting between the men was of a quality not often struck outside of Ireland. It went on for some minutes, but at last the Boches were all killed or prisoners, when they became aware of a terrible noise at the end of the trench. They looked, and the sergeant he said, 'Mother of Heaven! is it an elephant or a whale that we have?' for there was water in the trench, and as far as could be seen there was a huge fat thing wallowing in it, blowing like a porpoise. They could not see rightly what was happening, so they let him blow for a bit. Laughing they were, when he suddenly says, 'Shall we stop?' in English. 'It's bored I'm getting, old dear,' said a voice from the region of his stomach. 'Glory be,' said the sergeant, 'the officer is underneath. Pull him off, boys.' When they had pulled him off, they dug the officer out of the mud. 'It's a prisoner I would be,' said the German. 'I am not liking the life.' 'It's a prisoner you are,' cried the officer, when he had taken the mud from his mouth; 'but it does not alter the fact that you have the last bottle of my

Madeira smashed, and it's amputated my foot must be where you sat upon it.—Take him back out of the trench,' he said to the sergeant, 'with the other prisoners. His general appearance is beastly, and he has the rum spilt as well.'

"I'm doubting whether he will get down the communication trench, sir,' said the sergeant, 'for it's a large man he is, and the trenches are not yet widened.'

" 'Then roll the blighter along the top,' said he; 'but take him away, for I dislike him greatly.' "

By devious routes we had now reached the Houses of Parliament, and were turning for home. My thoughts as to whether by any chance the arbiter of my fate and finances should be leaning gracefully from the window of my bank, and imagining that some one had given me a Rolls Royce, again become gracious as in the days of long ago, when once for over a week I was in credit, were interrupted by Cassidy's exclamation. The Guard was changing at the Horse Guards, and the usual crowd was watching. "'Tis great lads they are," he said—"great. They can march and the y can fight. They can sit still in a trench,

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and they can charge, and there are few that are their equals."

And then I left him, to squeeze another fiver out of that granite boulder—my bank account.

CHAPTER VI

A WORD TO THE SHIRKERS

And—which is more—you'll be a man, my son.

KIPLING.

"It makes me sick, sir. I would like to take those cigarette-smoking, pigeon-chested malingerers and transport them out of the bars in which they make eyes at a fat woman they dare not kiss for fear she would be after smacking their faces, when they would run home and tell mother they were hurt. I would take them away from the football matches, where they scream insults at the referee, knowing he is too far away to hit them. I would take them away, with their dirty, wretched, contemptible little minds and bodies, and I would dump them straight into the trenches."

A Saturday afternoon football crowd, getting into the Underground train in which Sergeant Michael Cassidy and I were returning

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from a visit to Wimbledon to celebrate his return to convalescence, had occasioned this outburst from my somewhat excitable comrade.

"Look at that thing, sir," he said, indicating a vacuous youth opposite, with very tight trousers and very yellow boots. "What good does that fellow think he is to the country? It is not as if he were an ornament, for 'tis the most unhealthy-looking addition to the landscape I have seen since I was by the bedside of my mother's brother when he died and left the black heifer and six good laying hens to my cousin Shamus—the scheming blackguard."

"Are you talking about me, my man?" demanded the youth at this moment, carefully shooting two purple cuffs and regarding my companion with a pale and watery eye.

"I was," answered Cassidy—"I was." At that moment the train stopped, so his remarks were painfully audible. "I was wondering what it was that your father was after saying to your mother when he first saw you, or whether he was that type of cheese-mite that was unable to hope for

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anything better ; and by the holy saints, if you speak to me as 'my man' again, you rat-faced coughdrop, I will hang you out of them doors in the centre by your feet, saving only for the danger of your face causing uneasiness to the signalmen."

A merciful influx of people interposed at this moment between Cassidy and the youth, who, with trembling hands, was endeavouring to open his cigarette case, while his eyes roved, like a frightened rabbit's, from Cassidy to the door and back again, as if fearing that at any moment the threat might be put into execution.

"Can you picture that thing in the trenches?" said Cassidy, "at least that thing as he is now ; for I have made men of worse than that. Can't you see it screaming and blubbering and begging the Boches to send their shells where they will not be after hurting the pride of the local picture palace? And them other things too sitting beside him and thinking they're men." His eye travelled impartially over the five youths sitting opposite him, whose agitation at last culminated in one of their number, with a pretty taste in mauve socks and yellow

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clocks, swallowing a large portion of his Woodbine. "They have not the virtues of men," he went on, "nor their vices neither. They can neither fight nor drink; they cannot hate nor love. They are beneath contempt entirely; and 'tis for them things, sir, that the men of the country is bleeding over yonder."

"They're a sorry crowd, Cassidy, I admit," I answered, "but there's been a lot of harm done by lumping every one in the country who doesn't wear uniform into the same category of funks and shirkers." I had vivid recollections of the one and only time I had ventured to London in mufti, and the lady with a tomato and a bunch of grapes in her head-piece, who had presented me with a white feather in Piccadilly—but that is neither here nor there.

"I would not be forgetting it either sir," he remarked. "There are men, good ones, who would be with us yonder if they could, only they are prevented by things they are unable to alter. 'Tis a bad heart they have, or short sight or the like. Of them I would say nothing. But 'tis of them blabbering apologies for men, them kinema creepers, them

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things that think they are men of the world, and can neither ride a horse nor shoot with a gun, who cannot make love to a woman nor stand up to a man—'tis of them I would say a lot."

I was glad to notice at this moment that Purple Cuffs' breathing was almost normal again.

"I would take them five football snouters," he continued, "and I would heave them by their necks into a trench, where I would follow them to have the pleasure of showing them the sights. The trench would have the water standing in the bottom of it, and there would be a wind blowing that would cut through to their skins like a knife. And above the howling of the wind sweeping down the trenches and into the shelters, another noise they would hear, which they would not understand at the first—never having heard that noise before. They would stand huddled together—I see them in my mind—and then I would talk to them. 'You hear that noise?' I would say to them. 'Not the wind I mean, but that swishing noise passing over your heads. You hear that thudding in the earth in front, that moaning in the air? It is

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not football that they are playing now, my lads; you are not watching a game you cannot play yourselves, you are watching the game of death, and if you jump up now and abuse the referee you will not do it a second time. You are watching the game that others have been playing while you sat at home and played shove-halfpenny; you are watching the game of men with men, when you walk and you talk and you eat and sleep with death—and how do you like it?

“‘You see that flash down the trench there? You hear that roar? Just come with me, my five brave huddlers, just come with me and we will see what has happened down there beyond that traverse where we cannot see. Oh! ’tis quite safe if you duck your heads—them bullets will not hurt you. Come along, my heroes. ’Tis making you more uneasy than the picture palaces to represent a coal-box? ’Twas no paper bag that burst round the other side of that traverse. You have never seen a dead man, you say—you with the purple cuffs? Your face is white, is it—and your teeth is chattering—and your hands are wet with the sweat, for you can guess what you’ll be after seeing on the other

side, can you? You do not want to, you say, and there's sickness in your stomach and weakness in your knees, and you would sell your soul—if you're after having one at all—to be quit of that whiz overhead for a bit. But what of the others, my lads, what of all the other boys who are out here? What of the lads who have got a bit of earth over them, and the lads who haven't even got that, but are lying staring up at the sky with eyes that will not again look at a football match, though it was liking that game they were—same as you? Why should they be stiff and stark, my heroes? Why should they have run this risk—*for you*? Are you thinking they wanted to—but they did? And why are you not doing the same?

“ ‘And here we are at the traverse; and 'tis the other side we're after looking at. 'Twas there we saw that coal-box burst, wasn't it? You'll be stepping over the traverse where it's fallen down, Mr. Purple Cuffs—ah! what is it that you're after stopping for? Step carefully and you will not touch him. But as you pass just look at his eyes. For why have you not been running the same risks as he has done? Why are you not standing in these trenches,

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with the sound of death in your ears, and the sight of death in your eyes, as a man should stand, if he would hold his head up and count himself a man? You might be hit yourself, you says—you might have your eyes fixed on them grey clouds with that fixed stare that does not see them scudding overhead; and that you would not like. Why, no, perhaps not—but are you thinking that he liked it any better? 'Tis not nice to die when there is so much one is after living for, but 'twas just the same with him at your feet. Why are you not doing the same?

“ ‘ You will mind that thing you are treading into the slush there. Oh! yes, it is, my lad—it's a leg that is, and it's belonging to the little officer gentleman in the corner. You're looking at him, are you—and it's wanting to know where the other has gone, that you is? 'Tis little matter. The officer gentleman, though his eyes is closed, yet he will not open them again, for his legs is gone and his chest as well. And he has been out here, while you—what have you been after doing, you five? Why should that little officer gentleman, who was what you will never be—a man—who played the games

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you could only look on at—why should he have done this thing *for you*? He was paid for it, you says—'twas his job—'twas bad luck. Will the pay he got give him back his legs and his chest, you worms? And was it his job to defend *you*? Can you not defend yourselves? 'Twas his job to defend them that is unable to do that same—the women, the children, the invalids. Is it an invalid you are? It is not, you say; then why are you not doing your job and standing beside that officer gentleman? Is it, my lads—now I'm asking you—is it that you are afraid? You are not, you say; but did a man ask me that question, 'tis not so I would answer him. I would have my hands on his throat, and it is not repeating it he would be. And I still wish to know why you are not standing beside the little officer.

“ ‘ And here is another in the same trench, and it's alive that he is. Give me a hand, ye dogs, give me a hand to make him easier, for it is not long that he has left. He will not again see England—nor a picture palace, nor any of the things he liked—same as you like them; it is no difference at all that there is between you, saving only that he is a man

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and you are not. 'Tis a girl's name he'll be trying to say, if he can speak for the blood that is in his throat. Loosen his collar, Purple Cuffs, for it's a little comfort it will give him, or do you shrink from the touching of that wound? And yet this same lad got that wound for you. Why are you not here with him? Why should he be dying, while you creep about at home in safety, for you are not an invalid, you say, and you are not a coward—and it's asking you why, that I am; and you are unable to answer me. I mistrust them that cannot answer a plain question. Is it that the work you are doing at home here is important to the country, and must be done? Then I have no more to say. But what is your age, ye tight-trouser'd thing, and what do you do? You are twenty-four, you say, and you work in a shop, selling stockings and the like to the ladies. 'Tis clear you cannot be spared, is it? You dirty little beast, is there not a woman who can do that same job? Is it a man's work to sell the chemises at such a time?

“ ‘And you with the mauve socks next door—what is you doing? In an office, you says, and afraid of losing your job. There are

many jobs, my lad, which will be going to spare when this show is through ; and even if there are not, why should I fight to keep you in a job ? Does you really think you are worth it, you worm, you ? You are doing nothing for England at all, and the men of the country are bleeding to death for you, and your chemises, and your halfpenny nap in the back office. Mother of God ! you makes me sick ! ”

The train came to a grinding stop, and the five youths who had been the subject of Cassidy's diatribe rose and majestically walked to the door, each in turn throwing a withering and scornful glance at my companion, who watched them with interest. “ I would not be surprised if they did not make faces at us through the window,” he remarked as the door closed on the last of them, “ for he did not appreciate my remarks about the signalmen, I'm after thinking. Ah ! but 'tis cruel, sir,” he said, turning to me. “ 'Tis cruel to think of them pimply little beasts creeping about the country, and then remember what the lads are doing over the water. To think that Mr. O'Rourke gave his life for such as them. Did you hear the story, sir ? ” as the train drew up at my station. “ Come

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round to-morrow and I will tell it you, for it bears the telling.'

"I will, Cassidy," I said. "Good night."

I reached my club, and picked up the evening paper. "Desperate Fighting at ——." What was it Kipling said in those immortal lines :—

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a man, my son.

This chapter was written in January 1915. Since then many of those who hung back have crossed the Vale.

But there are still men who wear, for reasons best known to themselves, glasses of blue and yellow; there are still men who—though of fighting age and fit—have joined home defence units; there are still men who, robed in khaki, out in France—also of fighting age and fit—drive motor-cars at bases, and specialise in cocktails. . . .

No one can sort out the sheep from the goats; they, and they alone, know. But in the days to come, when they are called on to give an account of their manhood, it may be they will regret with tears of blood.

An Incident during the Retreat

CHAPTER VII

THE BRIDGE

"I HAVE been wondering, sir," remarked Cassidy to me the next day, "whether we were not perhaps a little hard on those five boys yesterday, that we saw in the train."

I had strolled round in the afternoon to hear from him the story of Dennis O'Rourke, and what had happened at the Bridge.

"It is not maybe that they are afraid, sir," he went on, "for I'm thinking that if they were, they would be far more frightened of saying so, but it is that they do not realise; and 'tis hard to see how they can, for it has not been brought home to them—none of those little things that one sees, which serve to make one understand what it means.

"I remember one day—'twas in the early stages when we were drawing them after us into France. 'Twas hot—hot as the devil—and towards the evening I was riding quiet

like, along a nice shady road, for all the world as it might have been a lane in England. For the time there was but little noise of firing at all—'twas just a bit of a lull—but we had seen them, and we knew they were coming, coming in motor-'buses, and the saints know what else; in thousands and thousands they were pouring along after us, though at the time we did not know 'twas as bad as it was. Oh! 'twas cruel; but as I say, I was away on my own—the sappers mostly were those days, being split up for the different jobs—and as I rode along the road I saw a lad leaning over the hedge sucking a straw. Away back behind him was a great house and stables, and I said to him, I said,

“ ‘Bong soir,’ I said.

“ ‘Cheese it,’ he answers. ‘Who are you bong-soiring?’

“ ‘When I heard him talking plain like that, I pulled up and looked at him. ‘I thought you were a Frenchie,’ I said to him, ‘till you opened your beer trap. Do you grow here, or are you touring the country for fun?’

“ ‘I ride for the stable up yonder,’ he said, pointing with his thumb.

“ ‘Bedad !’ I said, ‘ ’tis a training stable you have,’ for it had not struck me they had those things in France at all.

“ ‘Did you think it was a potted meat factory ?’ he said.

“ ‘I did not,’ I said ; ‘ but unless you hop it pretty quickly it precious soon will be.’

“ ‘What are you meaning ?’ said the trainer, who had come out and overheard what I said.

“ ‘Unless you and your horses and your lads hop it smartly,’ I said to him, ‘ it’s hopping in another direction you’ll be before the morning, for by that time the Germans will be upon you.’

“ ‘Are you sure ?’ he said, ‘ for I have some valuable horses with me, and I would not lose them.’

“ ‘Am I sure ?’ said I. ‘ Would I be riding for three days without ceasing, with a thirst like the morning after, if I were not sure ?’

“ ‘What will I do ?’ he said, ‘ for ’tis the first I have heard of it.’

“ ‘Do !’ I said. ‘ The first thing you will do is to give me a drink, and my horse as well, and then you will gather your lads and you will ride south, and you will not stop riding

for a week or so ; for if you do not, 'tis little riding you'll any of you do again.'

" When he saw I was in earnest 'twas a terrible blather he got into, and the last I saw of him he was riding into the dusk with his boys behind him and his stud of twelve horses, while the old woman who cleaned his house was hopping along beside him in the road, hanging on to his stirrup leather—and she a martyr to the indigestion as one of the lads told me. I know not what happened to him, but the next morning I saw his house fired, and 'twas a mercy I had the whisky removed. 'Tis the little things like that that make the people realise what war is ; and we have not had the like in England at all, and it perhaps would be a good thing if we had, I'm after thinking."

He paused to light another of my cigarettes.

" But it was of Mr. O'Rourke I would tell you, sir," he went on. "'Twas the morning after the little affair of which I have just told you, that we received the orders to go at once to a bridge near by and have it prepared for the demolition. Mr. O'Rourke was in charge, and I was with him, and we had about a

dozen of the lads. When we got there we found 'twas a big one over a river—a sort of suspension bridge, and 'twas evidently an important one. 'Twas another scorching day, and Mr. O'Rourke he says, 'Let's get it fixed up quick, boys,' he says, 'and it's a bathe we can have.' Well, there is not the necessity for me to tell you the details of the fixing—of how we placed the gun-cotton on the cables, and the leads were running to the exploder hidden behind a tree on our own side. We tested it all, and we had the bit of fuse and another detonator fixed up in case of any failure in the electricity. When we had it done, some of the lads had a bathe, and we lay in the shade of a few trees, most of us fast asleep—for you will mind that our orders were only to prepare it for the demolition, and not actually to blow it up. 'Twas still —'twas just peace: the heat haze shimmering in the blue, and the buzz of the little flies and things, to send one to sleep, for we were well behind our own men. Two hours later—well, we will come to that, sir, but it will give you an idea of how those fellows came on. It seemed as if we had been there but a minute, but maybe it was half an hour,

when with a crash one of the Horse Batteries galloped over the bridge. The dust rose in great choking clouds, and through it we could see the drivers—their collars open, their faces grey with it, some with hats and some without, themselves sitting down and riding like men possessed, while their horses sweated and galloped and the guns swayed behind. In a second they were gone, and only the dust remained.

“Mr. O'Rourke he turned to me and he said, 'They were going fast even for the Horse,' he said, 'along a road; and I would to Heaven it had been the other way they were galloping,' for I should tell you, sir, they were going south. Five minutes later we heard them come into action a quarter of a mile behind us 'Covering the retreat again,' he muttered; and barely had he spoken when an Infantry regiment came in sight—going the same way. Mr. O'Rourke and I we went into the centre of the bridge to keep our eye on the charge, and we watched them come by. Walking dogged they were, with a fixed sort of stare, and some were asleep as they marched, and some were whistling through lips that made no noise. The sweat was caked on them, and

they were grey from head to foot, and the officers were staggering up and down cheering them on—for those lads had been going without rest at all for ten days and more. And one of the sergeants said to me as he went by, he said 'There are thousands of them, and they're close behind.' When they had gone I went to Mr. O'Rourke and I said to him, 'It's close work it's going to be, sir, I'm thinking, for they are near behind.'

"And then up galloped a staff officer.

"'Are you the Engineer officer in charge?' he said.

"'I am that,' said Mr. O'Rourke.

"'There are still two squadrons of Lancers between you and the Germans,' he said, 'and they will be across soon, for they are only covering the Infantry who have just gone over. When they are over blow up the bridge, and do not linger to admire the view, for it will be unhealthy.'

"'Very good, sir,' says Mr. O'Rourke.

"'And,' says he, 'let there be no mistake, for the love of Heaven; for should the charge fail we are undone. This bridge is the most important of any there are to be destroyed, and they must not get it.'

“ ‘They will not get it,’ says Mr. O’Rourke ; and with that he galloped away. When he had gone we walked off the bridge. ‘Pray Heaven, Cassidy,’ he said, ‘that all is well, for we will not have much time, if there is a fault, to adjust it.’

“ ‘It will be all right, sir,’ said I, ‘for we have it tested.’

“And then the Cavalry started coming back.

“ ‘Clear out, you boys,’ shouted an officer ; ‘they are in touch with us, and we cannot hold them longer.’

“ ‘Cassidy,’ said Mr. O’Rourke, ‘take the men back, for it is no good them stopping here.’

“ ‘Would we be leaving you, sir ?’ I cried.

“ ‘You would not,’ he said ; ‘but what good can you do ? for if the charge fails there will be no time to relay it, and if it succeeds ’twill be easier for me to get away alone than if you are all here.’

“I saw his point, and I knew he was right—though it went against the grain to leave him in the lurch, as it were. But he would not alter, and so I took them away—muttering and cursing they were. I took them to a

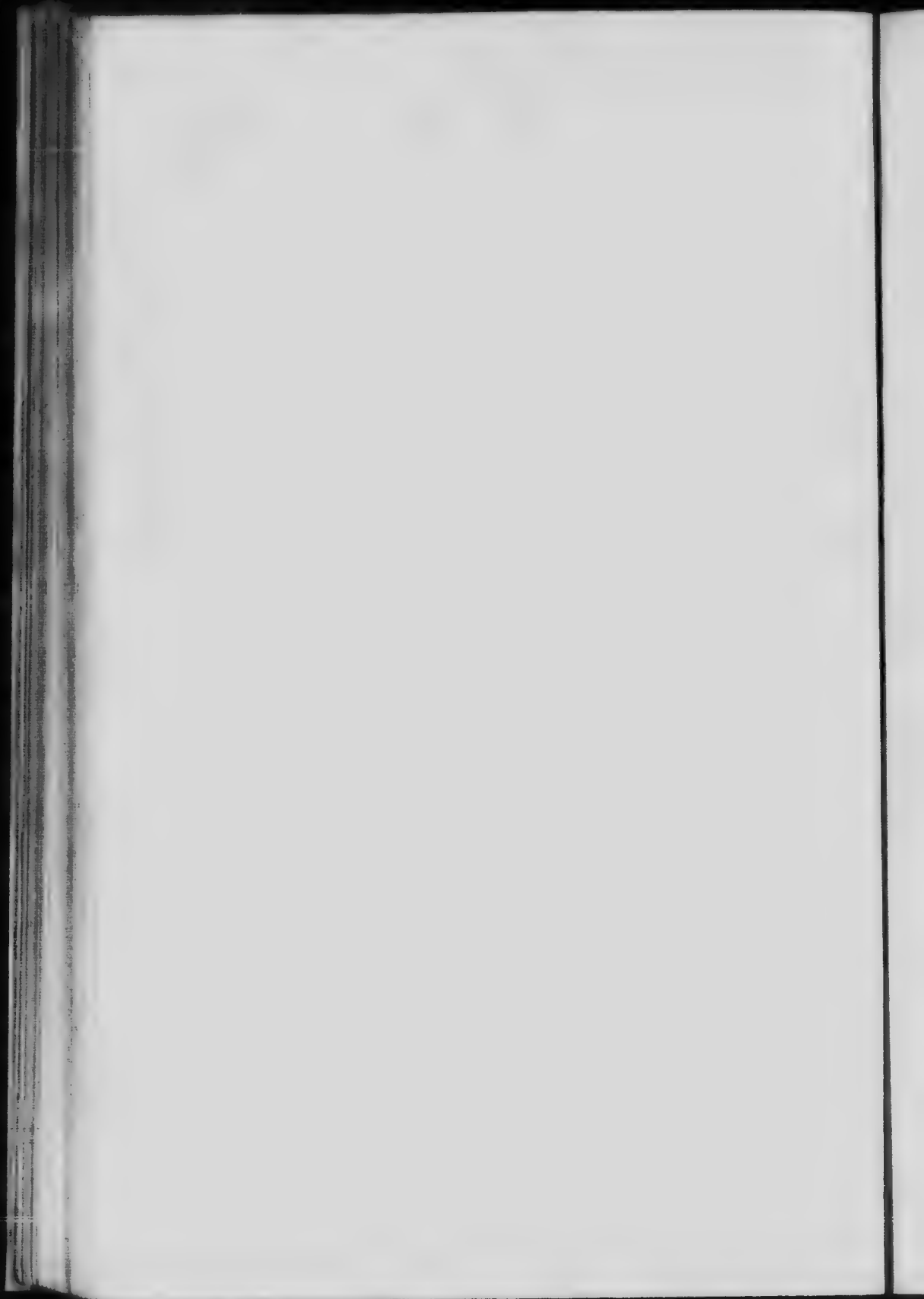
little rise under cover two or three hundred yards away, where it was easy to clear from when the bridge was down without being fired on. Before I went I said to him, I said, 'We will be yonder, and it's there we will wait for you. If you go that way round you can get there easily.' Just after we got there we saw a major gallop over the bridge with his orderly behind him, and he shouted something to Mr. O'Rourke. We saw him running to the exploder and fixing the leads, and then he paused and straightened himself up behind the tree. From where we were we could see two Uhlans coming near the bridge, with more of them, hundreds of them, behind. And then he forced down the handle of the exploder. 'Mother of Heaven!' I screamed, for nothing happened. He did it again, and it failed again. You will mind, sir, that from where he was he could not see the Uhlan and they could not see him—but we could see both of them from the rise. The men were sobbing and cursing. A corporal caught my arm, and he muttered, 'It was not to fail,' he said, 'and it has. What will we do?' 'What can we?' I said, 'for they are on the bridge.' And then of a sudden we saw

the lad creeping along under cover of the trees, and he reached the bridge and ran like a hare to the charge. The Uhlans saw him too, and rode at him; and the men started screaming and cheering, for they were off their heads, and they thought he would be able to do something. 'But what can he do?' I groaned, 'for the fuse will not burn quick enough. They are too close.' He reached the charge first, and his revolver was drawn. It was drawn, I say, but it was not at the Uhlans it pointed. For a second he stood there, with his head thrown back, and it seemed to us as if he laughed at them. And the lads saw what was in his mind, and they were silent—saving only one, and he threw himself on the ground sobbing. And the Uhlans saw what was in his mind, and one pulled his horse over backwards trying to get off the bridge, while the other rode at him. And then he fired. From the range of an inch he fired into the gun-cotton, and the roar of the detonation shook the heaven. And he and the Uhlans disappeared. They were there one minute and the next they were not. And then, with a great sort of rending crash, the whole thing fell into the river below.

"We looked for a moment and then we stumbled away—and the most of us could not see with ease, for the lads had loved him well."

Cassidy paused and looked into the fire.

"So it was not a failure," I said softly as I left him.



Zillebeeke, November 1914

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHARGE OF THE COOKS

"I WONDER if by chance you recall the fat lad that was cook for the officers' mess when we used to go on the manœuvres in England," remarked Cassidy to me one day. We were strolling slowly through the Park, getting his foot into work again; but scenting one of his more expansive moments, I suggested a seat.

"A great lad he was," he went on when we had made ourselves comfortable, "and it was cook he was for the officers over yonder. You recall his name, sir—Michael M'Doolan. 'Tis true that he was not the equal of a French chef, but he was a worthy lad to work under our doctor, of which same gentleman and his way with the people I have already told you. Of course you will understand, sir, that before we came into the billets, and whenever we are fighting, the doctor has no time to do

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anything but his job, and so 'tis the cook who does what he can for the officers, such as milking any cow the owner has forgotten about, or the like.

"I remember one day—we had come up to where we are now, sir—it being a day in November, and we were all working pretty hard just then. You'll mind, sir, our hours are different to the others, for we are on always, and we never know when we shall be wanted or where we have to go. The officers all go out each night with parties of men and work in front of the trenches and on the different jobs, and come back in the morning—when they want a bit of food before they go to sleep. 'Tis the same with the men. They all come back into the farm or the dug-out behind the firing-line, where they get a chance of lying up during the day.

"In the place where we were then the officers were in a farm. 'Twas a bit draughty, as there was more hole than wall, owing to the shells, and it was not over-distant from the firing-line itself, but hidden from it by a little hill. On the day I speak of I was walking from my own bit of a pigsty to their farm, when I felt the zip of a bullet as it

went past my head. Thinks I to myself, 'That was as close as was convenient,' when another one zips past too. I was taking no risks, so I jumped into the ditch, the better to think. 'If there is not a blackguard drawing on me,' I says to myself, 'may I never again see Ballygoyle; but where is it that he is, for it is not in the firing-line that he can be?' seeing, as I have told you, we were hidden from it by a hill. I crept along the ditch to the officers' farm, and there I finds M'Doolan. The officers and men were all out, but he was not alone, for there were gathered with him behind the wall of the farm the four other cooks for the mess.

" 'What the devil are you all doing here?' I said, as I got out of the ditch. 'Is it a mothers' meeting that it is, or why are you not at the dinners?'

" 'Do you see the farm yonder?' says M'Doolan, pointing to one we could just see;

" 'I do,' says I, following his finger.

" 'They have us marked from there,' he says. 'There are three of them, I think, and it's sniping us they've been for the last two hours.'

" ' 'Twas from there, was it,' I says, 'that

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it came?' and I looked through a hole at the farm.

" 'Have they been at you, Sergeant?' they says.

" 'Why else would I be in the ditch?' says I. 'I am not after training as a Boy Scout.'

"At that moment there came another shot. There was a terrible 'cluck,' and all was still. M'Doolan, he jumped up and rushed out before we could stop him, shouting, 'The devils, the devils!' at the top of his voice.

" 'Come back, you fool,' I cried, and went out and pulled him in. I pulled him in, I say, but he was peering through the different holes in the wall like a man possessed.

" 'Was it a cluck I heard behind there?' he says—in a terrible way he was—'was it a cluck, for if so 'twas Rosie.'

" 'Rosie,' I says, 'what are you talking about, and who's your Rosie at all?'

" 'It was,' he cries, peering through one of the holes, 'for I can see her—and it's dead she is.'

I looked out and I saw a hen lying in the corner with most of its feathers off, and she certainly did not look very lively.

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" "'Tis only a hen,' I cried in disgust. 'Away with you and your Rosie.'

" "'Tis not that,' he says; "'tis the Major. 'Tis terrible particular he is about getting his egg in the morning when he comes in, and when we comes here a week ago I found little Rosie. She was the only one left, and saving only that an ammunition wagon passed over her the day before yesterday she has been doing well. Oh! 'tis a terrible thing she has passed away, Sergeant.

" 'Why, only this morning she failed to do her duty, and when I went out there was nothing. The Major he says, "M'Doolan," he says, "where the deuce is the Hen Fruit? Hen fruit, you fool!" he cries, irritable-like, when I looks at him puzzled, "produce of the feathered biped—egg?"'

" 'She has misfired, sir,' I says. "'Tis either the wagon which passed over her two days ago, or else the round of ammunition she ate yesterday—but she is looking unwell.'

" 'Well, put her in a corner and sing to her this morning,' he says, "and she'll either lay an egg or the bullet—but for Heaven's sake get hold of eggs somehow."

" 'Well, I was doing my best. I had her

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in the corner over there, and it was hypnotising her I was. She was standing on one leg, and something was happening. I was clucking to her, when a bullet went between my legs from that same devil yonder. So I hopped it, but little Rosie stayed on, for I watched her, and 'tis an egg she would have laid before evening, for it was in earnest she was. And now what will I be after saying to the Major about it at all ?'

" ' 'Tis rot you're talking,' I says. ' If the hen has been shot—and, bedad, after it had been run over by a wagon, and had eaten a round of ammunition, and had been looked at by you close, 'twas a merciful end for the poor bird—why are you five great hulking blatherers here ? Away with you, and capture the house and the snipers. Are not five Sappers enough to do it, even if they are cooks ?'

" ' Less of your even and your cooks, Sergeant,' says one. ' We will do it at once.'

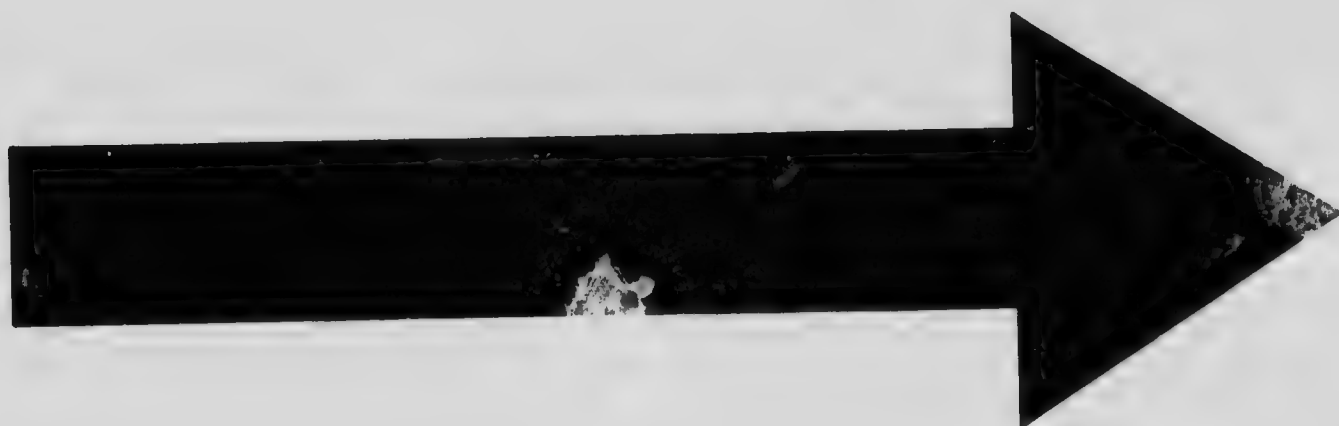
" Bedad ! sir," laughed Cassidy, " you'd have laughed to see those five. M'Doolan elected himself the commander, and off they went up the ditch in great style, for all the world like a herd of hippopotamuses going

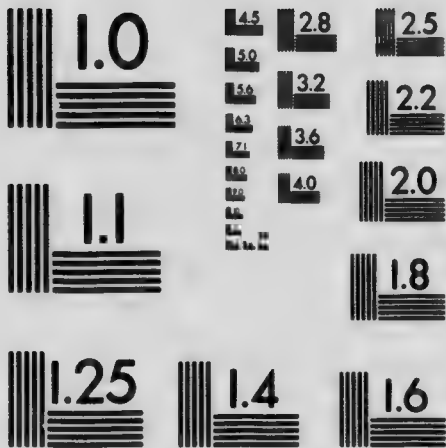
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to water. I followed them to see the fun. When they came to the end of the ditch they were still about two hundred yards from the house where they were. You'll mind, sir, the line was a bit mixed up just there, and there were a lot of the German snipers behind our own lines and all over the place. M'Doolan in a voice like a foghorn, gathered them together behind a refuse-heap and explained the situation.

" 'Two of you,' he says, 'will fire at the devils from here, to keep them engaged like, while we three will go round the back and rush them,' and away they crept. The two that were left behind were not in a manner of speaking marksmen, but as they had not fired a shot since the beginning they were all over it. They plastered the house and the ground and the refuse-heap they were lying behind with bullets, and one of them struck a cow in the next field—leastways with a bellow of pain she disappeared towards the trenches.

" But the diversion served, for the snipers had all their attention on the refuse heap, and M'Doolan and his two warriors reached the back unobserved. They crept up the stairs, and M'Doolan had his gun in one





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hand and Rosie in the other, for he was minded she should revenge herself. There were only two of them there, and they were occupied, as I have said, with the two outside. They crept into the room, and then with a whoop they were on them. M'Doolan tackled one. He hit him in the stomach with his rifle and in the face with Rosie, so that he dropped his gun and started praying. The other two had not their rifles, but one of them hit the second German over the head with a bottle of curry powder, while the other collared him by the legs. The first of them was trying to get Rosie's foot out of his mouth, and the other was sneezing curry when I got there; and it was a great diversion, for M'Doolan was taking no risks, and he still had them covered with his gun, while the other two were trying to gather up what was left of the curry powder.

"'Murderers!' roars M'Doolan, brandishing Rosie in front of them, 'could you not have let her be while she laid her last egg? You Huths, you Gons!' he says, getting a trifle mixed. "'Tis my prisoners you are.' With that he seized them both, and when the other two had taken their guns he marched them

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out. 'Twas a great procession. We went down the road with the Germans in front, the one plucking curry powder from his mouth and the other feathers. The first man we ran into was the Major.

" 'What the devil is this !' he cries, putting up his eyeglass.

" 'We have avenged the death of Rosie, sir,' says M'Doolan, holding up the hen. 'Those two devils slaughtered her as she was getting ready to lay the egg for your breakfast to-morrow.'

" 'Great Scott !' says he, 'let's hear about it.'

" So M'Doolan told him the story. When he had finished the Major looked at him and then he looked at the Germans. One had still got his teeth full of feathers and the other was covered with a sort of yellow foam. Lastly he looked at the hen, and then he laughed.

" 'Take 'em away,' he says to me ; 'take 'em away, and send 'em to headquarters with my compliments.'

" 'But Rosie, sir,' says M'Doolan. 'Is it roast or boiled you will have her ?'

" The Major he looks at M'Doolan and

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laughs again. ' 'Tis a second Napoleon you are, M'Doolan,' he says, ' and it is well you have done to capture them two ; but with regard to your cooking, do which you like, for we will not know the difference.' "

November 1914, near Messines

CHAPTER IX

THE SPY

"IT seems strange," I remarked one morning to Sergeant Cassidy, as we sat together in the Park, whither he had hobbled on his crutches, "that those fellows run their spy system so well. Why aren't they spotted more easily?" Only that morning I had been reading in the paper of a German officer who had spent some four or five days behind the British lines, his identity only being suspected when he was back safely behind his own again.

"Maybe, sir, maybe," answered my guide and counsellor. "But 'tis not so strange after all, when you come to think of it. For when a man dressed as a French officer comes behind the English lines, and another dressed as an English officer is himself behind the French, 'tis hard to tell where you are. For our knowledge of the language is not all it might be, and 'tis hard to tell if it's a German

talking English or a Frenchman—even for the officers.”

Reluctantly I was compelled to admit that my gardener’s unhealthy wish for pens, ink, and paper, and my aunt’s notorious predilection for cheese in all forms—the only blot on our otherwise stainless escutcheon—which in the days of my youth I had so frequently translated into perfect French, had not fitted me for the onerous task of spy-hunting behind the lines.

“But, bedad, it’s right that you are, sir,” continued Cassidy, when he had temporarily taken over my cigarette case. “They are extraordinary—the way they send men behind our lines and find things out, and no one can deny that those same men are full of pluck. For they know the penalty when they are found out—and there is not much glory over their work at all. They do what our own officers would not like the doing of, because they would be after thinking it was dirty work.

“I mind me once when we caught one of them at it. ’Twas more by luck than anything else that we did that same, but ’tis a story that bears the telling.”

A temporary lull occurred at that moment, owing to the excitement of his catching what I believe is known as the "glad-eye" from a passing fairy, and very nearly slipping off the seat. When he had waved his crutch twice, and comparative calm again reigned, I ventured to recall the great man to the affairs of earth.

"Tell me about the spy, Cassidy," I said firmly.

"What a peach!" he murmured. "Begorrah—a darling; and 'tis Irish she was with her eyes." He sighed deeply. "But 'tis of the spy you would be hearing, sir. For the proper understanding of what I would be telling you, it is clear you must know how the firing line is at the present moment—and what the lads are after doing. You will mind that there are farmhouses—dotted they are all over the place—and barns and old mills and the like. Those same barns were occupied by the Germans in most cases before they were taken over by us as we pushed them back. Of course, as you know, they have not moved at all lately, but I am speaking of maybe two or three months ago. What was easier than for those fellows to

leave a stray man or two behind them who was able to talk the English or French, and put a telephone or the like in one of those same barns which was connected with their own lines, and where they knew they would be?

"You will mind also that the lingo they speak up in the North, where they are now, has a heathenish sound to it, and a man might be a German or a Jew from Patagonia before one was the wiser for it. And there is another thing too, sir, that you must be after bearing in mind, and that is the importance of this same spying. For with the aeroplanes and the like, 'tis impossible to move the lads during the day, as it is seen they would be, and any big massing of them is bound to be known. So 'tis at night that the moves are done, and 'tis then that these fellows come in. For you will mind that, with the line as it is, if maybe a bit of a hill like is captured—though it may only be an advance of a few hundred feet—yet the new position may enfilade their line, and when the guns are brought up may cause them great uneasiness for two or three miles. Then maybe the winning of that little bit of ground may allow our lads to get the range of a railway

they are using, or the like. So you will see, sir, that those little advances are much more important than they would appear in the papers; but the success of them depends on secrecy, and if 'tis given away beforehand by a spy, the lads have no chance.

"We were in a farm at the time. 'Twas a funny old bird that had that same farm, all screwed up and crazed like. The boys called him Gilt the Filbert—and his appearance was like to a monkey that had not washed for months. It was all alone in the farm he was, so the interpreter told me—you mind that all our regiments and batteries yonder have a French interpreter with them—and his wife had died of the shock when the Germans had been in the farm.

"I says to him, I says when he told me, 'By the Holy Saints,' I says, 'if the old lady's face was like most of those I've seen creeping about round here, 'twas probably a heavy casualty list those Boches had themselves when they see her.'

"We never saw him most of the day. Down in the café he was, they said—or rather 'estaminet,' as they call 'pubs' in those parts—drinking to drown his grief. The old

devil! 'Twas great the way he had us boiled. Well, one morning the General he comes round to the farm, and his staff with him. I misremember what actually he had come for; 'twas an inspection or something, but 'tis of no account. When 'twas all over the officer gentlemen were sitting in the farm having a bit of lunch, and from what Mr. Tracey told me after, the General was talking a bit open like about the intentions of the big guns, and what they were going to do. Nothing much, you mind me, but things it would be inconvenient for them German lads to know. Now, in that farm we were in then there was a cellar—they have them in many of them—where they keep the beer and the like."

Cassidy paused a moment and laid his hand on my arm. "While I think of it, sir," he said impressively, "when you get there, be careful of that same beer—for 'tis cold on the stomach it lies, and there is but little warmth in it."

I duly noted the fact, for when an expert speaks it behoves all who can to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest.

"As I was after sayin," he went on, after a short but solemn pause, "there was a cellar

in this same farm, and one way of reaching it was from the room where the officers were sitting. As luck would have it, the lad who was the cook—that same M'Doolan of whom I have already told you—had run short of milk, and the officers were thinking a little hot milk and rum would be good for their health. The Doctor—the lad that had the way with him—was a great believer in it as a medicine, and the Major, I am told, did not disagree with him on the matter. So M'Doolan was in a great way, for the General was minded to try it, and devil a drop of the cow oil was there. He was shouting for Gilbert, and making a noise he said was like a cow, for not a word of the lingo could he speak. 'Twas a terrible commotion, and when he came outside to find the old man, making this noise, we thought the ration lorry was upset.

“ ‘Tis not another drop the old cow will lay if she hears you,’ I says.

“ ‘I cannot find Gilbert,’ says he, ‘and the General is dying of thirst and the cold.’

“ Away he goes, and for some reason he went into the cellar, for there was another way in besides the one I have told you of.

He gets in, and, bedad, he had not been gone a minute before there was a noise like a Black Maria inside.

" "'Tis the cow,' I cried. 'He has her caught, and it's milking her he is.'

" "'Tis not,' he cries. "'Tis Gilbert, and 'tis a spy he is, the dirty devil.' And with that he comes up with the old farmer man. He had him by the back of the neck, and his clasp knife was in his other hand, to make him move the faster. 'I found him,' he says, 'with his ear at the door of the officers' room, and 'tis listening he was to the General.'

"And then, as you may think, there was the devil and all. The lads came running, and the officers appeared, and the General, wiping his moustache, for without the necessary milk they had been drinking it neat.

" 'What is it at all?' he says, 'and why is there all this commotion?'

" "'Tis a spy, sir,' says M'Doolan, 'and it's his ear he had to the door when I caught him.'

"And then a change came over them all, and they became very silent. The Major puts in his eyeglass and looks at the men. 'You may dismiss,' says he, quiet like, and

they dismissed. The General he looked at the farmer, and then he turned to the Major.

“ ‘Is this the source,’ says he, ‘of the leakage of information?’ For I may tell you, sir, that though at the time I did not know of that same—Mr. Tracey, he told me after—there had been a great leakage, and the reason had them all beat. ‘What have you to say?’ he says, and he turned to the farmer.

“The farmer he stood there, sullen like, for it was afraid to move he was, seeing that M'Doolan's clasp knife was touching his neck.

“ ‘*Comprends pas,*’ he says, or some such words, though not knowing the language I could not say exact like.

“ ‘Go down, Tracey,’ says the Major, ‘and search the cellar’; and Mr. Tracey he went off. While he was away we were all silent, and the General's face was stern, for we knew without the searching. In a few minutes Mr. Tracey came back, and in his hand he held a telephone.

“ ‘ ‘Twas under the sacks, sir,’ he says to the General. ‘I cut the leads and here it is.’

“The General looked at the telephone, and then at the farmer. ‘What have you to

say ?' he says, and his voice was terrible to hear.

I was watching the farmer, and 'twas a strange sight, for on the sudden he seemed to change. He realised 'twas the end, and he straightened himself up. 'Twas acting he'd been, and he was not an old man at all. He brought his heels together and stood to attention, giving him look for look.

" 'Nothing,' he says.

" 'You know the penalty ?' says the General.

" 'I do,' he says, and he did not falter.

" I suppose it was the change in him, but the Brigade Major he gives a start and then he looks at him close. 'Good God !' he says, 'were you not shooting with Lord —— ?'— he mentioned one of the quality—'were you not shooting with him last year ?'

" 'I was, Major Drayton,' says he, and his voice was cold.

" Major Drayton turns away, and his mouth was sneering, for he liked not finding him a spy.

" 'Is there any letter you wish to write ?' says the General. 'I will send it for you when I have read it.'

“ ‘There is not,’ he says, still standing stiff and rigid like.

“ ‘Is there anything you would wish to say ? ’ says the General.

“ ‘One thing, and one thing only,’ says he, and his voice rang out clear and loud. I remember it well, for the lads were looking from the barn to see what was occurring. ‘We have different ideas,’ he says, ‘you and I. There are thousands of us doing this—glorying in it—for ’tis the work of a man. I am of the Prussian Army, and I tell you that your day is over. For you English your star is setting—you have ceased to be a great nation—you are on the wane. What matter my death ? There are others. For years we have prepared, we have made ready, we have waited—and now your hour has come. It is *der Tag*,’ and he raised his hand above his head.

“ Everyone was silent, and the General was silent too, for the man was terribly in earnest. At last the General spoke, and his voice was not terrible any more. ‘We will not argue the matter,’ he said. ‘As you say, we see things differently. Perhaps in time you and your nation will find that you have made a

terrible mistake, and that the star of England has not set, but is blazing fiercer than ever.' And then he paused, and the officers round stood stiffly—just like the German—and one, I remember, caught his breath in a sob almost, for he was young and just out. 'There is no more to be said,' went on the General, 'and as you have no letter to write I will not delay. You will be shot in half an hour.'

"The German he saluted, and not a muscle of his face moved.

"'Twas very gravely and quietly the officers saluted too, for, German or no German, spy or no spy, he was a brave man."

Any old place—the Trenches, Winter, 1914

CHAPTER X

MUD AND NOISE

"'Tis a strange war, sir," said Cassidy to me one day, as we watched the ceaseless stream of London traffic through the open window.

"'Tis a strange war, and one which makes a man think, and wonder what will be the end of it at all. 'Tis beating them we shall be in the end, but who will be giving us back the friends and the lads we have lost? They tell me we may be after taking money from them to punish them, but will money give back life to those who are lying stiff and stark out yonder—the lads we have fought with, and drunk with, and lived alongside of for years?"

"It's the same in all wars," I answered soberly, for in all faith the thought gives one to think.

"Ah! 'tis different, sir," he said. "Was I not through the South African War, and are you putting this on the same footing at

all? Some of these battalions have left at the present moment eight or nine men out of the thousand odd who came out with them in August. Think of it, sir—eight out of a thousand! And where will you be finding the others at all? They are not all dead, I know, but they are either that or wounded or missing. You cannot conceive it at all, sir. 'Twas only the other day I was talking to a lad home on leave, and he was telling me what it was like in the trenches now. It was a sergeant he was, and they were relieved one night in the ordinary way like by another regiment. They were not going back there again for four days, and when they had formed up behind, and the roll call was being taken, they found one of the lads was missing—at least there were many missing, but it was of this one he was after speaking.

“The other regiment took over the trenches in the dark, and another one took over from them two days later. And then the first regiment went back again to the same place. That night the sergeant happened to go down a bit of a communication trench which the other regiments had not happened to use. At the end he found the man of whom I

spoke—the one who was missing. He was wounded and weak, and he was stuck. Stuck, I tell you, stuck in the mud, and it was unable to move that he was. His cries had not been heard, and for four days and four nights had the lad been there. They got him out just before he died. 'Twas no one's fault—just sheer bad luck—but it shows what those trenches are like these days; though no one can realise what they really are till he has actually seen them. If you imagine a gateway into a field, which is not metalled, when there has been a rare lot of rain, and lots of horses and wagons and the like have been in and out, and then think of that same condition it is in being four foot deep and mixed with an Irish bog, 'tis a fair idea you have of some of the communication trenches.

“Bedad, sir, they cannot realise it at home here at all. Sure they are shown in the pictures as happy and laughing—them lads in the trenches—and 'tis laughing they are, for if they were not 'tis mad they would be for the horror of it. You have not heard it yet, sir, the noise. 'Tis the noise that is the devil, and 'tis almost impossible to describe what that noise is like to you. There's the whistle

of their rifle bullets at times as they pass over your head. 'Tis a sound, you know, like the drone of bees on a summer's night, and the thud, thud, as they hit the parapet in front of you. Then there's the bark of their maxims—a coughing sort of noise it is, sharp and clear cut—three or four shots at one time, and then maybe a great long bark for half a minute. And 'tis not one only, for the other guns take it up, and it seems continuous like all along their line.

“And then the shells. Their shrapnel is not much anyway, though 'tis dirty the bullets are, and an ugly wound they give one. But 'tis the dirt of the bullets more than their speed that has one caught. The big ones are different. 'Tis a strange noise they make. 'Tis like a huge hornet or maybe a big cockchafer, like those one meets in the August evenings on the hills. You hear those Marias come buzzing out of the sky, and they pass over one's head with a droning sort of noise. And then they burst. 'Tis a big sort of 'plonk' they make, and the dirt and the mud fly around. There's a great cloud of smoke too, and yet they look far worse than they are. Of course, as you will guess, sir,

if they burst in the trench 'tis mighty unpleasant for those that are in the vicinity; and if they burst near the trench as like as not the side will fall in, and some of the lads will be buried, but generally 'tis dug out they can be.

“And then there's the little fellow filled with high explosives, and it's a nasty little devil that he is, for he sounds angry and he bursts angry. Bedad! the noise is awful, for there are all our own lads firing as well, and our guns and the spelting of our maxims. And by the holy saints, if you happens to get near where a battery of those French 75's is, you'd think your ears would be split. Mind you, sir, it is not always so. I was in the trench one evening, I remember, and suddenly the firing seemed to die away. Gradually it ceased, and I pulled out my watch. 'Twas half-past five, and for about ten minutes there was not a sound. 'Twas still, absolutely still, and the men looked at one another, for the silence sounded so strange. 'Twas very funny—that sudden deathly stillness. The men was almost talking in whispers. And then a man fired—just one chance shot—and in a second they was at

it again. But 'twas strange, that silence—very strange.”

Cassidy paused, and as I handed him my cigarette case, I wondered if perchance for those few minutes the dread Harbinger himself had stayed his hand, appalled at the richness of his harvest and the insensate stupidity of his playthings. And then his cynical laugh as the crack of a rifle started him yet once again on the pilgrimage of Death.

“There is another noise you will be after hearing, particularly yourself, sir,” he went on after a while. “’Tis the noise of the snipers, and to my way of thinking ’tis the worst of the lot. It’s going out you will be at night with the lads to put up wire, or to dig a bit of a trench maybe. Perhaps the guns are still at it, and away in the distance the sky will be like summer lightning. Then dull booms are going on all around you, and occasionally the sky is all lit up by one of them shells that does not explode but goes off like a firework. Maybe you are working in a wood, and every now and then there comes a crack from somewhere, and you hear the zip of a bullet in the ground near you.

'Tis that occasional crack that is the devil, for you do not know where it comes from. And sometimes a man near by gives a little cough, and his shovel clatters against the pick, and when you get to him you find he will not use either again.

"They are the devil, those fellows, for in the majority of cases 'tis just pure luck whether they hit you or whether they do not. Sometimes you will see one in a tree, maybe. He is not moving, but against the dim light in the sky you will see a strange shape—as like as not in a fork. Very likely 'tis only imagination, but perhaps 'tis not; and you'll have a shot, and if 'tis a good one there will be a crash and something will fall through the branches, and there will be a thud as it hits the ground. But as often as not they tie themselves on to the tree, the better to shoot. They are brave lads, and they stop there, perhaps clean through the day if 'tis a good tree. I remember me finding one once. Shot through the heart he was, and he was still lashed tight, and it's dead he had been for a week.

"And you will bear in mind, sir, that 'tis not all on their side. Whether 'tis true or

not, I would not be after saying, but one of our own officers—a captain he is in the Infantry—is said to have two hundred and fifty of them to his own cheek. He creeps out by night with a sergeant, and takes a second gun with his servant as loader, and 'tis great sport that he has.

"'Tis a strange war, that it is. They are all that close to one another," and Cassidy shook his head reflectively. "There is but little sport in it."

"I suppose that is the reason we are being trained in using hand grenades and bombs so particularly," I remarked. "They should be good when one is so close."

"You are right, sir," he said, as he held out his hand for my cigarette case, "though to my way of thinking those things are very often more dangerous to those that throw them than they are to the Germans. You have to be very careful with them, or 'tis yourself will be blown to glory. Take those hand grenades, for instance. As you know yourself, sir, they explode on percussion, when they hit the ground. You take them in your right hand, and they have streamers behind them to make them fly straight when

you throw them, and you hold those same streamers in your left. When you has undone the safety arrangements 'tis all ready to go off. I remember one night one of the Infantry gentlemen had some he was after throwing. He had the range beautifully, he had. 'Tis bowling at cricket one is after doing with them, as you know. You hold them behind your back in your right hand, and sweep up your arm like as you were bowling. Then you lets go with your left of the streamers, and away she flies.

“ 'Twas great execution he was doing. He had, as I say, the range grand, and he had them all thrown save only the last. 'Twas one particular bit in their trench he was minded to reach with this last one, and a bit farther it was than he had thrown before. So he made a great effort, and he hit the back of his own trench with the grenade it came up. 'Tis the danger, and the thing of which you must mind—for you will not do it a second time. Those things explode just as easily when they hit the ground in an English trench as when 'tis a German they fall into. There was but little left of the poor gentleman, and six men was dead, too,

when they came to look from behind the next traverse.

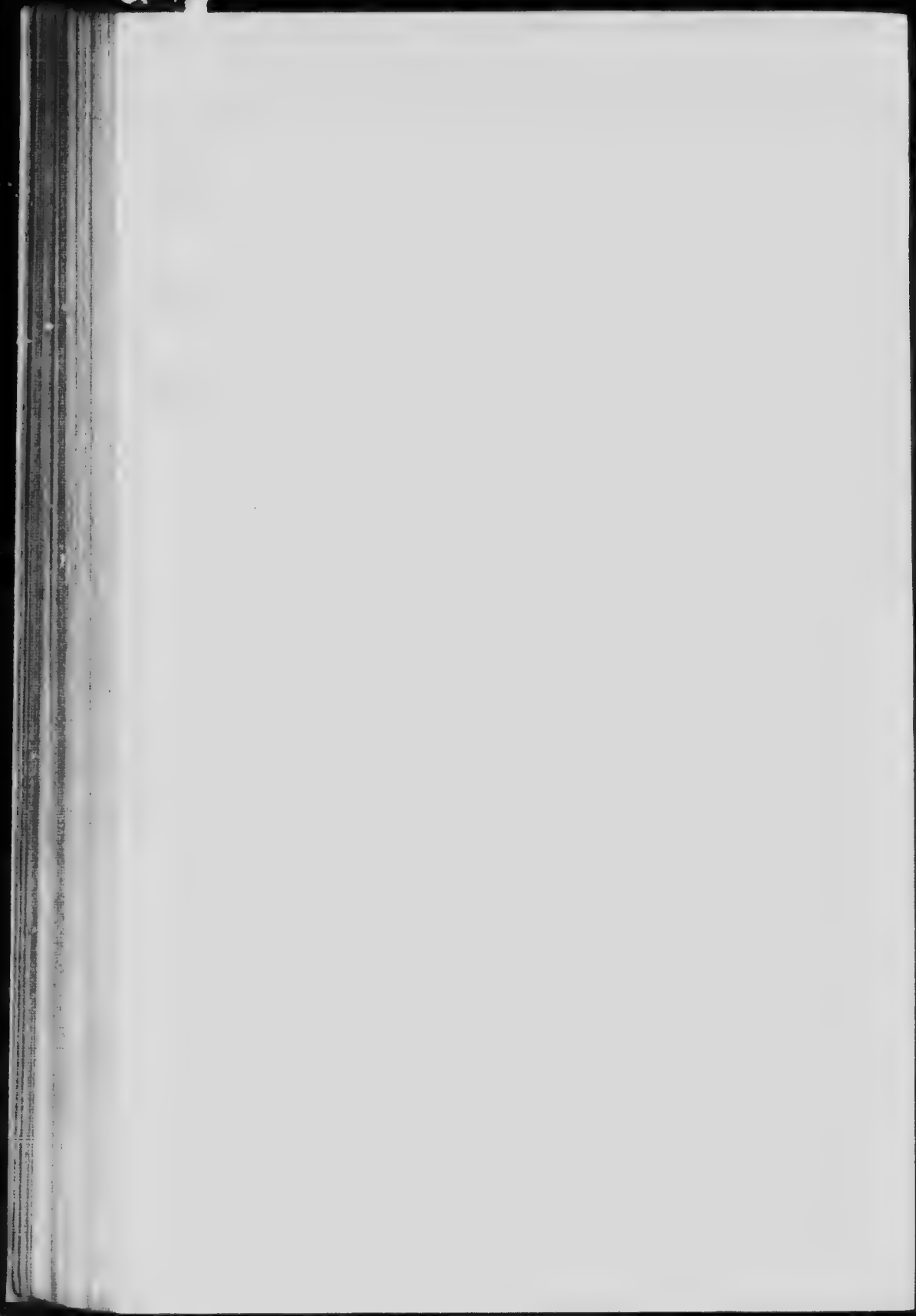
"Then there's that other sort of bomb, there is, which they're after making from the ration jam tins. You mind them ration jam tins, sir; 'tis about six inches high they are and three across, and 'tis always 'plum and apple' they have inside. Sure one of the lads the other day got one of strawberry, and it was killed in the rush that he was. You fill them with bits of iron and the like, and put a bit of gun-cotton inside, and a detonator, and a bit of safety fuse. About two inches you use, which should take two or three seconds to bury. You lights the fuse and waits a second, and then you throws it. 'Tis a dangerous affair, for it will not explode till the fuse is burnt, and, as you know, that fuse is queer stuff in the burning. If you throw it too soon they throw it back, and if you leave it too late it's after bursting in your hand, so it's in the soup you are anyway with those things. 'Twas one of our own officers, it was, who went up one night to throw them for the lads in the trenches. 'Twas well for a time, and then one of them ad the fuse too long. They threw it back,

and, by the saints it burst right in his face. Plastered he was with bits of iron and nails and things that he had put in himself.

" ' 'Tis hard,' he whispered, as they carried him away, ' 'tis hard that I should be done in by the nail that came out of my own back this morning.' "

" It is time," said a voice at the door, " for your tonic, Michael Cassidy."

And with that I went away.



CHAPTER XI

THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE

" 'TWAS a strange thing, that Christmas truce, sir," remarked Sergeant Cassidy to me one afternoon, " and 'twas not a thing to be encouraged at all, and yet 'twas only natural, I suppose, for there comes a time when a man is sick of fighting, and his being craves for a bit of peace."

" It was not approved of by the authorities, so I heard," I answered.

" And quite rightly, sir. For we are but soldiers out there ; the lads are not particular what they fight for, but 'tis their job to fight. More than that they do not ask. 'Tis a scrap of paper and the like, but you are after knowing the boys, sir, and 'tis not caring much that they are. They are there to fight, and the sooner 'tis over the better they will be pleased. 'Tis funny devils they are, as you know. I have seen those lads, some of them,

with my own eyes. I have seen them, when those Germans were coming on in their masses, singing they were that song of theirs, and line after line was being mown down, till a great heap of their dead and dying were in front of us—I have seen them almost chuck down their guns and refuse to shoot, so sick were they with the awful butchery of it. 'Tis not that they are soft-hearted. If one of the lads, as you know, gets his dander up, the devil himself standing at the mouth of hell, would not be after stopping him.

"'Twas in one of the Cavalry regiments that a little thing happened, which I was seeing. One of the officer gentlemen found a wounded German officer close to our trenches, and in the general clean-up after one of their attacks—'twas when the Cavalry were in the trenches—he gave him a drink out of his water bottle. He took it—and I would tell you that it was a Prussian he was—he took it, I say, and as the Cavalry officer turned to go away, the Prussian drew his revolver and shot him dead from behind. 'Twas a big Irishman that saw it done, in the officer's troop, and for a second he stood stock still—for it was not believing his eyes that he was.

Then he came to himself, and he bellowed like a bull. He took one leap at the Prussian, and he had his gun in his hand. The Prussian pointed his revolver again, but before his hand was half up, the lad hit it with the butt of his rifle. The revolver went west, and his arm was cracked like glass. 'Twas making strange noises that the Irishman was, and his face was working like a man in a fit. He screamed curses at him, and his language was terrible to hear ; for the lads were watching, though without a proper understanding of what had occurred. And then the lad raised his gun, and his bayonet was on the end. 'Twas a fierce sight, for with a grunt like a pig he spitted the Prussian's head to the ground, and the steel was six inches into the ground on the other side ; and when he took his hands away the rifle stood upright, quivering, with the Prussian pinned like a beetle in a box.

“That is one thing, and when the lads heard what had happened they was like men whose women have been touched. But those Germans are not all like that, and 'tis a great mistake to think that they are. They are brave soldiers, and they are gallant soldiers,

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and it is not the lads who have met them who would be after denying it. And 'tis the terrible, the hideous slaughter which goes on when they make one of their mass attacks that tends almost to sicken the boys, for it does not agree always with their ideas of what is sporting. And that tendency must not be encouraged, sir, for we are at war, and 'tis not kid gloves one can wear for that same thing. That's why I say that things like that Christmas truce are dangerous. What would we have been after doing had the lads received orders for the attack that day? for whatever discipline one may have, sir, human nature is human nature, and when you have worn a man's hat and drunk his beer, 'tis hard to stick a bayonet into his stomach.

" 'Twas queer some of the stories that went around about that same truce. In some places it lasted for the whole day, and in some for but half an hour or an hour. 'Tis really an amazing thing when you come to think into it, sir. For weeks and months you have been lying opposite these men, and your one idea has been to kill them before they were after killing you. Then sudden

like you go out and ask them how their mother is, and whether the children are over the chicken-pox or not. You drink with them, you smoke with them, you sing with them, knowing full well that in a few hours you will be at it all over again, and the man you have your arm through will be trying to put a bullet in your brain.

"The officers were more stand-offish like, and they generally quarrelled over who started the war, for those Germans are just as certain that we did it as we are that they did. And as there is no method of proof—leastways none available out there—the meeting was apt to break up in confusion, there being no end to the argument save calling the other man a liar, which is apt to be taken more seriously out there than it would be, say, at the races at Ballygoyle, where 'tis a term of affection.

"Another strange thing there was about it, and that is the ignorance of some of their lads about the state of affairs. 'Twas extraordinary. Says one of them to one of our lads, he says, 'Why do you go on?' he says. 'You are beaten, and you know it, and 'twould be more healthy for you to

make peace now, as it is not hard we would be upon you. You are brave men, and so are we, and brave men should live, not die.'

"Our lad, he looks at one of his pals and laughs. 'Tis beat we are, is it? And why are you after saying that?'

" 'Why,' says the German, 'do you not know? Paris is in our hands, and the French are finished, and our Zeppelins float over your London every day. Shortly great ships will leave filled with troops for England—when we have sunk the rest of your fleet.'

" 'Say, Copper Nob,' for it was red-headed the German was, 'you've got the wrong end of the blooming onion.' Our lads were laughing. 'There weren't no Zeppelins over London the last time I was there; and have you ever heard of the Falkland Islands? As to Paris, the officer yonder spent his week's leave there, and it's just come back that he is. Some one's been kidding you, old dear; for 'tis you that are beat—not us.'

" 'You have been deceived, my poor fellow,' says the German.

" 'Oh! cheese it with your poor fellow,' says the lad; and as his tone was annoyed like, the officer who had been to Paris comes

up to stop any trouble. "'Tis beat, he says we are, sir,' said the lad, 'and 'tis Paris he says they have. Have you not just come from that same place yourself?'

"The officer laughed, for 'twas a dangerous subject, and he was mindful to drop it—but Copper Nob would not have it. 'Am I to understand,' he says, 'that you have been to Paris lately?'

"'I returned ten days ago,' says the officer.

"'But 'tis invested by us,' says the German.

"'I think not,' says the officer with a smile. 'There are none of your people within forty miles of Paris, in that part that you may have heard of—Soissons.'

"'It is incredible that you—an officer—do not know the truth,' says Copper Nob. He looked pityingly at him for a moment, and then his face changed. 'Ah!' he says—'I see. But you are a brave man, and a clever man, and is it fair to these men?'

"With that he went away, and left the officer looking surprised. 'What the devil is the little blighter talking about?' he says. 'Is what fair? and anyway what the blazes is he after meaning at all?'

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“ ‘I’ve got it, sir,’ says a sergeant who was by. ‘He thinks you knows all about it, and that the officers are keeping the men in ignorance of what has took place, the better to encourage them.’ ”

“ And that is a thing which is important, sir, to my way of thinking, and which must not be overlooked. For to my way of looking at it, it is immaterial what is really true as far as the soldier is concerned. For his spirits to be kept up, as long as what he believes is true, is good; he will carry on, and all will be well. And those German lads have been guyed up with stories, and all they think is that we are the lads who have been deceived. They are just as certain that our newspapers are lying—these soldiers in the trenches, I mean—they are just as certain of that fact, as we are that theirs are. So where are you at all? ”

“ But you can’t guy the big business men like that, Cassidy,” I said. “ They will find out soon that all is not well.”

“ Maybe, sir, maybe,” he answered. “ Of that you would be knowing better than me; and ’twould be strange, when they find out the real truth, if it did not make a differ-

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ence. But all I can tell you is this : that as far as their soldiers are concerned 'tis beat they think we are ; and they are utterly convinced that we are all being kept in ignorance of what is really occurring."

And I think perhaps that the near-finish optimists might do well to ponder the utterances of Sergeant Michael Cassidy.



CHAPTER XII

SAPPING AND MINING

"'TWAS mentioning to you the other day that I was concerning the difference between them Prussians and the other blackguards in their army—them Saxons and the others." Cassidy carefully adjusted a pillow behind his head, and then gazed reflectively at an extremely vulgar cigarette holder of which he was inordinately proud.

"They are different entirely," he continued, when I had justified my existence, "and it is careful one must be that when they are relieved in their trenches they do not change round. For should one have had those Saxon lads opposite to one for a time, one is apt to be after getting a little gay with them : bits of tobacco and the like are apt to change hands, and one is not above coming out of the trenches to take the air. If that same

thing is tried on with the Prussians the result is unhealthy, and it is not twice one does it.

“ ‘Twas only the other day I was hearing from one of the lads, of one of those Saxon regiments occupying a bit of trench opposite us. ‘Twas fed up they all were with the mud and the filth, and they knew—both we and they—that there was nothing doing. So gradual like they got a bit free and easy, until one morning the Germans hoisted a deck-chair on to the ground behind their trench.

“ ‘What is it at all they are doing?’ said the lads, ‘for ‘tis a strange place entirely for a deck-chair.’ And then they hoisted a white flag, and the lads were all watching, and one of their officers gets out and waves his hand to us. ‘Good-morning, Englishmen,’ he says, and sits down on the chair. He lights a cigar and starts reading the paper.

“ ‘Well, I’m ——’ says one of our officers, ‘‘tis a casual blackguard that he is. But he has nerve, and the saints forbid that he should come to harm, for ‘tis a man after my own heart that he is.’

“ And after a while, our lads and theirs,

they all came out and lay on the ground, and 'tis most days they are after doing it. About fifty yards apart they are, and they shout remarks at one another. For, when all is said and done, 'tis of small matter if we kill ten of them and they kill ten of us, as far as the result is concerned. 'Tis just twenty more of the lads gone to the other side, and no good from it at all; and that is all the result one will be after getting, however much one throws bombs and shoots on sight and the like. For in the part of the line where an advance on either side is impossible 'tis silly to sacrifice the lads, and that is where it differed from the Christmas truce. The lads who were hobnobbing there had been fighting the day before, and would be at it again the next—not like the particular Saxon lads of whom I am after telling you. 'Twas a curious thing that happened with them, too, one day, for the Captain was out in his chair, and he was drinking beer, and all the lads were taking it easy like, when one of our guns made a boss shot and put a shell right in the middle of them. 'Twas pure accident, but it killed ten of them.

“ ‘Get back in the trenches,’ shouts one of

our own officers, for 'twas annoyed he thought they might be. But the German officer did not move. 'Twas his glass he waved friendly like, to show that he understood and bore no ill feeling, and all went on as before."

Now, as I have mentioned, I have known Sergeant Cassidy for many years, and I have a very high regard for his many sterling qualities; but I am free to confess that I looked at him a trifle hard as I again replenished his cigarette holder. It struck me that the story had just a shade too much Ballygoyle flavour in it. For the benefit of those unacquainted with his history, I may mention that it was in the aforesaid hamlet in Erin that he first saw light, and his stories in connection with it put Baron Munchausen to utter rout.

"Is it deceiving you I would be, sir!" he cried with dignity. "'Tis perhaps a little free and easy like in the telling that I was, but 'tis true every word of it. For is it a shell more or less that would be after making one annoyed over yonder, when one has been where they are like bees when they are swarming? And you will mind another thing, sir. When one has a long line like what we have

yonder, the healthiness of it varies from mile to mile as a place of residence. There are bits of it which are of no use to man or beast, and there are others which are important ; but 'tis held it must all be. Then there are bits which are easy to hold, and bits which are not. If you find yourself in a bit of flat country, with the Germans fifty yards away, and a barbed-wire factory in between, 'tis at a stand-still you both are. There is nothing doing either way, and 'tis of little use trying to do it. And in those parts of the line where there is nothing of importance behind the other devils, such as a big railway junction or the like, 'tis stopped the fighting that they have. They just sit there and watch one another ; and as I was saying in the story I was telling you, and which you was after doubting"—Cassidy fixed me with a stern eye—"they see the folly of killing when 'tis no gain to either side that it will be.

"There are, of course, the other places, where by the nature of the ground one side or the other find it difficult to hold, or 'tis important to get a bit of a hill or the like ; and there they are at it all day long and all night too for the matter of that. Mining

they are and sapping, and the like, and it is not I that need be telling you what that means."

But here, for the benefit of the uninitiated, I will interrupt the thread of my old friend Cassidy's discourse. For in this warfare of moles every idea and rule of fighting—the A B C of it one might say, has been changed from what one was taught. And it is possible that to some people sapping and mining may be but terms vaguely associated with picks and shovels and explosions which occur periodically in the bowels of the earth. At the risk, therefore, of boring those who know, I will try and give briefly an idea of what really happens.

Originally, then, before the Huns hunned, that particular operation known as "sapping and mining" was associated with fortress warfare. Having found your fortress, you next proceeded to sit and look at it, from a trench and a safe distance. When you got tired of this interesting pastime, and were able to sit up and take nourishment again and all that sort of thing, you crept out into the dark and stilly night, and dug another trench a bit nearer the fortress. By dawn, when those

unfortunates who had received the next man's pick through their foot, had been removed to the nearest clearing hospital, you were all safely ensconced two or three hundred yards nearer home.

However, as frequently occurred, the owners of the fortress refused to conform to the rules, and insisted on directing the vulgar glare of publicity, in the shape of a searchlight, on the lads as they indulged in their nightly pastime. A tendency to open fire with maxims and other unpleasant instruments rendered it impossible for the men to do themselves justice, and other methods had to be resorted to—the first of these being known as “sapping.” Now to sap is a tedious operation, as only one man can work on the front of each sap at a time. Should any one doubt me, I would suggest that he digs a hole in his lawn about six feet deep in which he can comfortably stand, and then—never coming nearer to the surface of the ground than that six feet—that he should proceed to hew a passage from the hole to the pigsty or ferret house or some point of notoriety in the neighbourhood. Remember, he must not come to the surface of the ground and dig

down. He must go forward, always keeping six feet below the surface, hewing a passage out for himself as he goes.

True, in the trenches there is a waiting domestic to remove the earth to the rear on a silver salver, and other modern improvements laid on, but even so three feet an hour is very good going. There is another point, too, which must not be lost sight of. The average man, if he did dig a hole in the ground, in order to sap to the henery, and was left at large and so forth, would in all probability go there in a straight line—it being, I believe, one of those great truths to be spoken of in whispers, and discovered by my old friend Euclid, that the shortest distance between two points is the straight line joining them. A point which the dear man overlooked, however, is that a long straight line is a very nice thing for what is known as enfilade fire, and a maxim firing down a communication trench—and that is all a sap is—makes things unhealthy for the users of that same—as Cassidy would say. So saps proceed in a series of zigzags, and by this means you get as near the fortress as possible—putting sandbags filled with earth

on the ground in front of you, to protect your head.

When you have got as near as you can, you join the heads of all the saps with another trench, and pause to recover your breath. I am speaking of what we were taught before the war, for *nous avons changé tout cela*. (Following Cassidy's advice I have been taking French lessons.) Then comes the time when the General sends for the sappers and breaks it to them gently that a little mining would be an interesting form of amusement. When everyone has got over their joy, and written their wills, and finished what was left of the port, they start mining. Now sapping is slow, but it's like an aeroplane and a tortoise compared to mining. In sapping you are up in the air, but in mining you're not. You go down under the ground, and proceed to make a series of mine shafts, starting from the trench you were last in, towards the fortress. As you go along you put in a succession of wooden cases to hold up the sides and top of the gallery, and the earth is taken away to the rear as in sapping. The direction is given by the officers, and though great accuracy is not needed, it is advisable not to go

backwards or anything like that, as it tends to make the General unsympathetic.

Let it not be considered that one's troubles are now over. Being people of a cantankerous disposition, the inhabitants of the fortress proceed to countermine—that is, run out mines to meet you. In parenthesis I might say that one's object in mining is that when one has approached the actual fort itself, the mine head is stacked with explosives, and at the crucial moment all the charges in all the mine-heads are fired. When those that feel like it have exploded, any of the assailants who are not stunned by the shock, or killed by the flying bricks, rush forward with a hoarse British cheer and capture the fort. That's the idea, and they're always led by the Senior Sapper Subaltern present, which is very beautiful and all that ; but I have always thought personally, being what is described as an interested party, that a stone in one's boot, or a sudden attack of writer's cramp, or something of that sort, would be much more in my line. However, that is neither here nor there, and I'm really quite brave after dinner.

Well, as I was saying, the men in the fort

start countermining out to meet you, and their idea is to put little charges in the front of their mines and by exploding them make it impossible for you to work. When you are down there you can hear the tapping of their picks in the distance, but it is almost an impossible thing to tell how far they are away. They tried a big experiment once with some coal miners, to see if by listening they could tell how far off the other man was, but they failed. For if there is a fissure in the soil running parallel with the mine between you and the other lad, he will sound close to, and he may be fifty yards off. And if there's a stratum of some soil more or less impervious to sound perpendicular to you in front of your mine, he may be close, but you will scarcely hear him. It's jumpy work, for you never know but what the other fellow will blow up his mine and do you down.

In this war, however, as far as fortresses are concerned, the necessity for sapping and mining has disappeared. In fact, fortress warfare has disappeared, as it was understood in the past, for no fortress can stand against modern heavy artillery. It is almost unnecessary to have any infantry there—the

gunners can do the whole thing, and all the mining and sapping that is done now is done against infantry in their trenches. For it is easy to see that though these heavy guns are the devil when they have a fortress they can't miss, yet against infantry in narrow trenches they have a very different target, and one where they cannot do anything like the same amount of damage. Trench warfare now has become what fortress warfare was in the past—a slow and tedious operation; and just as with a fortress there came a time when further progress was impossible, save under the ground, so now, in those places where fighting continues without cessation, the only method of getting nearer the other trench is by sapping and mining, and the invariable retaliation of countermining.

Of that sapping and mining there are stories to tell.

CHAPTER XII

THE HEAVY LIEUTENANT'S PRISONER

"I WAS mentioning to you the last time you were round of the mining and of the sapping they are after doing over yonder," remarked Cassidy to me one day. "'Tis unpleasant, that it is, and no gentleman's way of fighting at all. Sure, there's enough death in the air without having to look for it under the ground as well. Moreover, as you can imagine, sir, there is nothing that so tends to shake the nerves of the lads as the explosion of a mine in the neighbourhood, for 'tis unhealthy for all concerned.

"'Tis a favourite trick, and one which is done on both sides, to mine one of your own trenches. The gun-cotton is buried and the leads are taken away to the rear, being hidden too. Earlier in the proceedings, when everyone was not so suspicious like as they are now, the lads would get out of the bit of trench

that was mined, and creep away to one in the rear during the night. When the Germans saw the trench was unoccupied—maybe they would discover it the same night when some of their creepers was on the war-path—'twas great excitement they was thrown into, thinking 'twas a retirement or the like. Like as not, the next morning there they would be. And then there would be a great tearing roar, and the mud and stones and—other things would rush up to the sky. A great stillness followed, and 'twas all over.

“ 'Tis a terrible form of warfare, for 'tis so relentless like, so cold-blooded. One's blood is not up—'tis not fighting that one is at the moment. Just the forcing down of the handle of the exploder, and forty or fifty of them is gone. Can one yet realise the thoughts of the lad who is pressing the button? 'Will I give them one minute more?' he says to himself, as the first faint streak of dawn is coming into the sky. And then he unlocks the exploder and raises the handle. He waits a moment, and the lads near him watch him fascinated like. For to bag a man with a gun is one thing; there is sport—there is an element of one against one, like when the quality

goes big game shooting. But to bag twenty men by a mine has not the same feeling at all, even if they are Germans. And as the men sit watching, maybe his jaw tightens a little, maybe he laughs a little, or maybe he curses a little, as suddenly he forces the handle down with all his weight, and 'tis all over."

Without speaking I handed him my cigarette case. The War of Moles, with death in the air, and death in the ground, and an enemy one never sees. And yet some one once said there was romance in it!

"Then at times they succeed in getting up near the other trenches with some mine shafts they have run out from their own. 'Tis an important point, maybe, and 'tis countermining the others are. But you are after knowing the difficulties of that same mining and countermining game, and 'tis an equal chance whether you meet them underground, and get busy with a pick or two—which same is a good weapon, I would tell you.

"Then maybe, as I was saying, 'tis an important place, and 'tis a big attack they will be making. For hours the guns plaster you with their little messages of love, and you sit tight wishing you were at home in a picture

show, with one of your best girls. All this time their lads that are going to make the attack are away back, sleeping their last beauty sleep, for 'tis drugs they use greatly, and maybe the idea is good. They give them all something to make them sleep, and then just before they come on they are given something else, which is to buck them up, and give them that feeling which you and me would be after getting when we had drunk well of the whisky.

"Then maybe all is ready, and they are singing and feeling full of the Fatherland when their engineers blows up the mines. 'Tis possible they may blow up great bits of the advanced trench, and all the men as well; and though maybe 'tis knowing they have been that they were mining, yet 'tis always unexpected when it comes, and the lads in the support trenches are sort of dazed like for a while. Then on they come, with officers behind to give them a bit of a reminder, should that happy feeling of the joy of dying for Bill ooze away too quickly, and officers in front who wish they weren't to lead them. But 'tis not mistaken I would have you, sir. Those attacks are not to be sneezed at. 'Tis

marvellous how they come on—drugs or no drugs. Right up to the trenches—dying in rows they are—but on they come. They are brave, and I would not be denying it.

“Then there’s a lot of sapping that both sides are after doing as well. They run out a sap-head from the trench, maybe to see what’s going on, or maybe to start a mine from, or perhaps just to get a more convenient place to fire from for one of their good shots. ’Tis an absolute rabbit warren, as you can imagine, but ’tis necessary that the location of those same sap-heads should be known more or less exact like, and what is going on in them, so that if they are up to any mischief—and ’tis not sapping you would be doing for fun or because it was a hobby—then you can make one of your own maybe, and scotch them that way. And as the habit of strolling about by day to find out what is the news, and to see if the grass is still green, is unhealthy, and unlikely to give satisfaction at all, save only to the lads opposite, ’tis at night that these little things must be found out. Oh! ’tis a rare lot of creeping goes on between the trenches at night.

“’Twas a funny story I was after hearing

the other day of that same creeping. 'Twas a sap-head them Germans had made, and 'twas the opinion of the captain of the company in the trenches just opposite, that 'twas not for the hatching of chickens or the like that it would be used. Also it was not certain that he was exactly where it lay. So one of the subaltern gentlemen he says to him one night: "'Tis out I will go, sir,' he says, 'and find where it is, and what they are doing at all.' He was a stout gentleman was the lieutenant, and one of the boys entirely.

" "'Tis well,' said the captain. 'Away with you, but do not linger on the parapet of our trench as you get out, or 'tis a landslip we will be having': for 'twas big round the stomach he was, and heavy.

" Away he creeps, and he had not been gone a minute when a terrible splash was heard, and a great commotion from in front.

" 'What has happened?' says the captain. 'Is it bathing that he is?' for there was a great blowing and spitting and spluttering, and terrible language for which that same officer was famed. The lads they listened, and after a while they heard his voice from in front like a fog horn:

" 'Tis my prisoner that you are, you rat !' and with a terrible upheaval the stout officer fell into the trench again, and with him a German. Dripping wet they both were and shivering in every limb, for the wind was like ice.

" 'What is it at all?' said the captain, 'and what is the family pet you have with you?' and he looked at the Boche, who was cowering in the corner of the trench.

" 'The rat,' says the lieutenant, when he could speak for the chattering of his teeth—'the rat,' he says, 'was creeping too. 'Twas out there I went, sir, and creeping I was towards the sap-head, when I met it. Suddenly his face loomed out of the night, and there we was with our noses almost touching.

" 'Are you English?' I says, for I could not see. " 'Gott in Himmel,' says he, and the words were not out of his mouth before I had him. 'Twas by the nose I seized him, for 'tis a great organ, as you will be after seeing, and 'twas close to me, blocking the landscape. I seized him by the nose and an ear, and 'twas struggling he was, so I sat upon him.'

" 'Great Scott!' says the captain. 'Poor brute,' and he looks at the German.

“ ‘I sat upon him,’ says the subaltern, ‘and at that moment the earth gave way. ’Twas on the edge of a Black Maria hole we were, which was filled with water, and it gave way. We were up to our necks in the water, but it was underneath he was, and I sat upon his face for a while—the blackguard. Then I pulled it out, and there it is.’

“ ‘It is killed I will be,’ said the little man, for he spoke English after a fashion.

“ ‘Why would you be killed?’ said the captain. “Tis death from suffocation, and death from drowning you have already escaped, and why would you be killed? We do not kill our prisoners,’ and he looks at him surprised like.

“ ‘Do you not?’ he says, ‘for they are after telling us all that you do,’ and ’twas happy as a king he looked. ‘If you do not kill me, I am glad, for maybe I shall again see London, where I have lived for many years.’

“ ‘Funny little blighter,’ says the captain. ‘It’s like something out of cheese that he is, and ’tis strange notions that he has of how we treat our prisoners.’ ”

“I hear they tell all their men that they will be killed if they are captured,” I said.

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"'Tis so, sir," said Cassidy; "and 'tis a thing or two I can tell you that I have seen, if you care to come round another day, on that same subject."



CHAPTER XIV

HOW TO BE HAPPY THOUGH WOUNDED

"I SUPPOSE that having only had a little fellow of an army in the past," said Cassidy to me one day, "one is after regarding the boys as the family pets, and that is why they look after our wounded so well. From all one is hearing, 'tis the idea with those other lads that once a man is wounded 'tis no more use that he is at all, and 'tis not bothered with him that they will be. Those trains packed with wounded men, and carts and the like, with the blood dripping out of the doorways on to the ground, and terrible groans, of which one reads in the paper, does not strike one as a picnic for Bank Holiday at all.

"'Tis exaggerated it may be, of course, and that I would not be after knowing at all, but 'tis fitting in that it is with their doctrines of hate and their ruthlessness, of

which I have heard tell. And 'tis another thing too, sir. They tell their men that we and the French, 'tis the same that we are; and, as you know, their men all think that if they are wounded and fall into our hands it is killed they will be. Do I not remember a little thing that happened a while back? In a wood we were, sitting quiet like, and eating a bit of bully by way of a diversion. Suddenly we see five of the most terrible-looking objects you have ever seen in your life, tottering through the trees. Filthy they were, and absolutely in rags. 'Twas unable to stand that they were with ease, and the five of them came lurching along, holding one another up.

“ ‘Saints preserve us,’ says a corporal to me; ‘’tis the chorus from the Gaiety that has blown in.’

“They held up their hands, leastways as many as could do it held them up—which were three hands in all—for, as I should have said before, they were Germans—Uhlans, to be exact.

“ ‘Walk up, my beauties,’ says I, ‘and it’s hearing we will be of your murky past.’

“Then they came nearer, and when we

looked at them closely—well, 'tis nasty things one has seen—but they were the worst. I would not be after telling you what they looked like, but we were all nearly sick.

“‘Water,’ gasped one of them in English. ‘Water, for the love of Heaven!’

‘So we gave them water, and, saints preserve us, how those five drank! They lowered pints, and 'twas hideous to watch them.

“‘Away with you,’ I says to one of the lads, ‘and get the doctor if it is not busy that he is, and tell him we have five wounded Germans.’

“The doctor he came along and looked at them, and we watched for a distance, for 'twas not near them we could be with comfort.

“‘Great Heavens!’ he said, ‘how long is it you have been in the woods with your wounds like this?’

“‘Five days,’ said the one who spoke English. ‘We thought you would be after shooting us if we came in, but now it doesn't matter, for it is shot we would wish to be—we are in such agony.’

“The doctor, he looked at me and shook his head. ‘'Tis waste of time,’ he whispered. ‘I cannot save them now—'tis too late. I

will do what I can, but 'tis useless it will be; Had they come in two or three days ago, 'twould have been easy, for their wounds are but light ones; but the gangrene has set in terribly, and 'tis dead by the night they will all be.'

"And they were, every man jack of the five. And had they not been stuffed with them yarns, and had given themselves up sooner, 'tis saved they would all have been.

"But take our own lads when they take it in the neck, sir." Cassidy absent-mindedly stretched out his hand for my cigarette case. "'Tis as easy as falling off a log. Take myself in the manner of speaking. As you know, 'twas in the foot I stopped one of their bullets one night, when we were putting up a bit of wire for the boys.

" "'Tis hit I am,' I says to Mr. Tracey, I says. ' 'Tis in the foot I have took it; and what will I do, for I doubt if I can walk with ease? '

"So he told off a couple of the lads, and they helped me back to the advanced dressing station. A dug-out it was, about a quarter of a mile behind the firing line.

" 'Tis in the foot I have it taken,' I said to the doctor-man who was there.

"He dressed it for me, and 'twas hurting a bit that it was, and I laid down and waited a while ; for the dug-out being a bit concealed like, 'twas easy in that particular place for a motor ambulance to come there. Sure enough, about an hour after, a motor ambulance arrived. I do not know if you have seen the things, sir, but they are made to carry four lying at full length on the stretchers. Two stretchers are hooked to the roof above the others, like the berths in a ship. Off we went, and there were four of us inside, bound for one of the clearing hospitals, which same are up close to the firing line—as close as possible without being under shell fire ; though some of them are, and it is shelled they sometimes are.

"We jolted and swayed and cursed, for the roads are terrible round those parts ; and though the driver is as careful as he can be, there are, like as not, others to be brought in, and it is not all night he can be over one trip. He has to go back for more. My foot was throbbing to beat the band ; but I mind me there was a poor devil with a shattered

shoulder beneath me whose moaning was terrible. Still, 'twas over at last, and we reached the hospital. The stretchers were taken out and we were carried up to bed. 'Twas morning when we arrived, and 'twas great to see the sight of a bed again—bedad! 'twas great—with sheets and the like. A great big room it was, all divided up into sort of cubicles like. 'Twas there I spent the whole of the day, and officers and men were brought in during the day, and others went out to be taken down to the base in the hospital trains. 'Twas in a good place I was in that hospital, I mind me, for towards evening my foot was a little easier, and 'twas talking about the food and the drink for the patients that the sister was to the orderly. 'Twas close by where I was lying, and I heard it all.

“ ‘Tis a little bit of chicken for the Captain yonder,’ she says, ‘and it’s a whisky-and-soda he may have. As for the Colonel—the spirit is not good for him, but a small bottle of the champagne will not be after hurting him at all.’

“ ‘ ‘Tis well,’ said the orderly. ‘And what of the other new patient—Michael Cassidy?’

" 'Ah!' says she, 'with a wound in his foot. 'Tis hot milk he may have.'

" But 'twas not more I waited to hear, for I let out a roar of 'Help,' so that the orderly came running to find out the trouble.

" 'Away with you,' I says, 'for I am not well, and your face is not either. 'Tis the sister I would see.'

" 'What is it, Cassidy?' she says, coming

" 'Sister darling,' says I, 'twas hearing you that I was. 'Tis whisky for the Captain, and champagne for the Colonel, and for Michael Cassidy 'tis hot milk. You would not be so cruel, for 'tis heating to the blood I have always found the milk.'

" ' 'Tis something you shall have inside it,' says she, laughing.

" ' 'Tis well,' I says, 'but as you love me, sister, make not the milk part too strong.'

" 'Orderly,' she says, 'beat up two eggs in Cassidy's milk,' and with that she was away. 'Twas terrible, but maybe she was right, for a little later my foot started throbbing bad.

" 'Tis a strange thing the noises in a hospital at night, sir. There were fifty or sixty

of us in that ward, and 'twas screened from one another we were by wooden partitions, as I have been telling you. Next door to me was a lad muttering to himself, and 'twas not he was talking of his best girl and the Kaiser all jumbled up together. Low groans were coming from different parts of the room, and 'twas a terrible air of restlessness brooded over the place. Away down the other end an officer was coughing as if he would tear himself to pieces, and once very loud and sharp a voice rang out 'Steady, boys.' And up and down went the sister, with a glass of milk for one maybe, and a cool hand on a lad's hot forehead, and a soothing word for all of us. 'Tis angels they are.

"And then—'twas only to be expected like—I got a bit light-headed myself, but not bad, for 'twas into a sort of uneasy doze that I fell: dreaming vividly I was—fever dreams—you mind the sort, sir. 'Twas a great dream, for 'twas back in Ballygoyle that I was, and 'twas a grand morning in November. For the hounds were drawing the gorse, and the greatest dog fox you have ever seen was away like a streak—with the beauties streaming after him. I heard their music—and 'twas

giving tongue I was myself—for 'twas four miles without a check as he was going. 'Hark-to-'em, the beauties!' I cries. 'Iorra on, my darlings!' and as I was coming to the first bank myself, 'twas a big one too, I woke up, and the sister was there.

" 'Hush, Cassidy,' she says, 'tis disturbing the others that you are.'

" 'But 'twas hounds I heard in full cry,' I says, 'and we were in Ballygoyle.'

" "'Twas not hounds,' she says, putting her hand on my forehead; 'twas the Colonel who had just got to sleep, and it's woken him you have.'

" As she was speaking he started again. Bedad! sir, I have never heard his equal. 'Twas like the music of fifteen packs of hounds, broken by periodical explosions like land mines going off.

" "'Tis great,' I says, and he woke up again with a terrible loud explosion that shook the room. "'Tis my grandfather he has beaten entirely, and 'twas him you could hear in the next street.'

" "'Twas the next morning they took me away again, for you will mind that at the clearing hospitals up at the front 'tis rare

that they keep one for more than a night. 'Tis never knowing that they are whether there will not be an attack or the like, and a lot of the lads suddenly to make room for, so they have you out at once. Carried downstairs in a stretcher I was to one of those motor ambulances again, and away we went to the station.

"And while I think of it, sir, 'twas a fine story I heard the other day, and 'tis talking of clearing hospitals that made me think of it. The very same night I was in one myself, those Germans put a few shells into another of them in another part of the line. 'Twas but little damage they did, saving only to burst one of those little high-explosive shells close by one of the motor cyclists as he was passing by outside. Nigh blown to bits he was, but there was still life in him.

" 'A doctor,' cried the lads who came running up, 'for 'tis hurt he is.'

" ' 'Tis no doctor I want at all,' he gasps, 'tis an officer. Get an officer—a staff officer if possible, but anyway an officer. 'Tis not a doctor will be doing me any good'—for the lad knew 'twas all over.

"They ran and fetched an officer, and

when he came, the motor cyclist clutched his arm and whispered. 'You have it, sir?' he says when he had finished, 'for 'tis important. Repeat it to me.' And the officer repeated it.

" 'Tis well,' he said, 'and 'tis not failed I have,' as the doctor arrived. "'Tis no good, doc.,' he says, "'tis all up; but I have the message delivered.' And then he turned over and muttered. "'Tis all right, dear,' he whispers, and he choked a bit, and 'twas all over. 'Twas a 'Varsity lad, they told me, and a man that he was.

" But as I was telling you, sir," he went on after a moment, " they took me to the hospital train, and 'twas comfortable it was too. 'Tis nice things to eat and drink you can get on board, and 'twas a nice lady was in charge of the carriage where I was. Kind she was, and with her a gentleman of the Red Cross. 'Twas between six and seven hours we were before we reached the base, where we were again taken by them motor ambulances to a big stationary hospital. 'Twas there I met the sweetest little hospital nurse I have ever seen. Begorrah! sir, she was——"

But at this moment I felt an interruption was necessary. "Quite so, Cassidy ; so they all are, and I trust Mrs. Cassidy shares your opinion," I remarked, with the vain idea of stemming this flood-tide of reminiscence.

"A sweet little fringe she had," he went on dreamily, "and the neatest little ankle you have seen outside of——"

But personally I was outside of the door.

CHAPTER XV

THE TERRIBLE DANGER OF "FUNK"

"Do you think, Cassidy," I remarked one day to him, "that all the stories one hears of the atrocities committed by those blighters are true, or are they a bit exaggerated?" I held out my cigarette case to save time, which he was gracious enough to accept without comment.

"'Tis a hard question, sir," he returned at length, "and one that I would not be after answering at once without thinking it over a bit like. 'Tis not doubting I would be at all that there were terrible things done as they came through Belgium—things that our own lads would not be after doing at all. For you know the boys, sir. They are sometimes a bit gay when they have a drop of the stuff on board—but there are some things they would not do at all—certainly if there were a lot of them together. 'Tis ashamed

they would be for others to see—though 'tis possible that isolated men here and there might be after doing a girl down. But if half what one hears of those Germans is true, 'tis the devils of hell they are. I would not be telling you of the stories I have heard, and 'tis wellnigh impossible to believe that some of them are true.

“Them Uhlans are the worse, because 'tis they who get sent off in small parties to scout and the like, and in many cases they are told they are not to come back without the information. They are under no control at all, and the result is they get drunk as can be. When they were first coming over France the country was full of wine, and 'twas as easy as falling off a log, to find the liquor. 'Tis not so easy now.” Sergeant Cassidy regarded the other side of the street with a melancholy air.

“Those fellows—they used to go out, and 'tis terrible the things they would be after doing. 'Tis a delight they would take in strapping the fathers and the brothers to the trees, and such things, and making them watch what they would do to the young girls. 'Tis devils that they are. But you have been hearing those stories, sir, and 'tis

nothing new I would be telling you if I should repeat them to you. There is one maybe you have not heard, and though it concerns the girls not at all, yet it shows the manner of men that they are.

" 'Twas a lad they caught on a motor cycle. There were six of them, and he was but one. I was watching it myself from a little hill through the field-glasses. 'Twas just pure chance I happened to be after seeing it at all—but there it is. They caught him fair and square, and had they shot him dead on the spot I would not be saying anything at all. 'Twould have been the luck of war, and 'tis what we entered the Army for. But 'twas nothing of the sort they did at all. He had not the time to draw his revolver, and if he had 'twould have been of but little use, before they had him upset in the road. He stood there—dazed like in the middle of the road, and the six of them were round him jeering. Then, while one in front spoke to him, those behind stuck him in the back with their lances. He fell down in the road squirming, and they stuck him again where he lay—though still they were not after killing him. And then a brilliant idea struck them.

'Twas a rick there was, of hay, beside the road, and they fired it. Then, when it was well alight, they chucked his machine on to it, and then the lad himself. Still alive he was, and they burnt him to death out of sheer devilry. Why could they not have killed him outright? The result was the same—one man less to us. But it serves to show the manner of swine that they are—full of senseless brutality.

“ 'Tis fitting in with what they have been taught, I suppose,” continued Cassidy after a pause. “They write of Louvain and Rheims and all the other beautiful places they have been after spoiling—and of them I would say nothing. 'Tis not for the likes of me to know the rights and wrongs of bombarding those beautiful cathedrals and the like. 'Tis part of their method; and perhaps, sir, 'tis better in the long run to strike terror into the hearts of the population by any means you can than to fight gentlemanly, like we do. I do not know about that at all—and 'tis not much that I hold with buildings anyway. 'Tis works of art that they are, so I read in the paper; but 'tis the little house at Ballygoyle, where 'tis the porter with a stick

in it one is after getting, that appeals most to me. But, as I say, 'tis no judge that I am at all.

"And there is another thing, too—which one may be forgetting. A church is, often as not, the best place in the village to see from. 'Tis higher than the other houses around, and 'tis the best place from which to view the effect of the artillery fire. Well, sir, if 'tis used for that purpose, they have a perfect right to shell it, church or no church. Would we not be doing the same thing ourselves? and 'tis possible that some of those destructive atrocities for which they are blamed have been due to reasons of that sort. I would not be saying, for I do not know; but 'tis possible. One thing is clear, sir, about their method of fighting. 'Tis afraid they would make us, and 'tis nothing they will stick at to do that same; and are they not after saying that all is fair in love or war? 'Tis not excusing them that I would be, but there is perhaps something to be said for the knocking down of the villages we have read of in the papers. Swine they are, without a doubt, but 'tis possible in a few cases there may be an excuse."

"But what excuse can there be," I demanded, "for the way in which they have butchered whole batches of people—old men and women, and children too, because they say some one has fired on them from one of the houses in the village? It is inexcusable, Cassidy."

"Maybe, sir, maybe," he answered. "I would not have you think that it was defending them that I was at all. They are swine, and I hate them, and 'tis only three should be kept at all—one in England, one in France, and one in Russia—and 'tis in a museum they should each be for safety. But what would you do yourself, if you were fired on by a civilian in a village? You do not know who it was at all; but one, or maybe two, of the lads are dead. What will you be after doing, not only to punish the village, but to prevent it occurring in the next one you go into? 'Tis a difficult point, sir, and 'tis not able you are to dismiss it at once, as if 'twas nothing. 'Tis the same old thing—the system of putting the fear of God into their enemies, and 'tis not I that would be saying 'twas a bad one. For as a soldier, sir, you will be after appreciating the value to the

other side of one or two cowards in the lads opposite them, and if 'tis more widespread still, 'tis even more valuable. But I'm thinking that what shows the type of blackguards they are, even more than their atrocities, is their dirty habits. 'Tis inconceivable, if you have not seen it yourself, to realise the filth and dirt one was after finding in some of those beautiful French houses where those blighters had been before us. 'Tis not only that they had smashed the whole place up, and torn down the lovely pictures and the like, and trampled up the flowers for no reason at all—'twas not only that, I say, but 'twas more especial like the filthy habits of the brutes. 'Twas disgusting—and for that there is no excuse. Sure animals themselves would be behaving better.

"No, sir, I would not be denying it. They are swine, with the manners of swine, and there is no excuse for many of the things they have done at all. But as soldiers one must realise that there is reason in bombarding a hospital if they think there is an ammunition train near it, and having at a church if there is an artillery observer in it."

"But they've abused the flag of truce as

well," I said. "There is no excuse for that."

"'Tis well you have said it, sir, or 'tis me that might have been forgetting to warn you of that same thing when you get out there. 'Tis a thing of which you must be amazingly careful, and over that matter it's a lot there is to be said on both sides. For take it this way. There is a regiment of them in the trenches, and maybe the company in the middle has been having a terrible doing, while the others have been getting off easy like. The company in the centre gets fed up, and shows the white flag. If the lads opposite to them are such fools as to get out of their trenches and go to take them prisoners, 'tis shot they deserve to be, and 'tis no patience I would have with them at all. The other companies have not given in, and like as not the other lads do not know that the white flag has been hoisted at all. That being so, if you go dancing gaily over to the other trenches 'tis your own silly fault, and the other lads who have not hoisted the flag are perfectly right in killing you. 'Tis they who must come to you, leaving their arms behind them, if they wish to surrender ; though there

is not many would reach you alive, for 'tis killed they would be by their own men. It takes pluck to come in and surrender if it means walking about between the trenches, for every one's finger is light on the trigger, these days, and if people are heard taking the air at night 'tis not healthy for them. Though they tell me a lot of their lads are doing it, and 'tis well, for that sort of thing is after being catching to the others. 'Tis a catching thing, is cowardice, and one man who is afraid, as you will know, sir, may be a terrible danger to the unit that is cursed with him."

"'Tis time your foot was dressed, Cassidy," said the sister, putting her head round the door, and with that he left me pondering over his last remark.

I seemed to see in my mind a line of men charging over the ground, with a hail of bullets to keep them amused; and then, as gradually the tension became more acute, the strain more terrific, the breaking-point beyond which flesh and blood cannot go more imminent, I saw a man waver in the centre. He wavered and stopped; he had broken, the weakest link in the chain. Behind him was an officer

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with a revolver in his hand, and without a second's hesitation the officer killed him, and gathering up the broken pieces the line surged on, hardly conscious that for a second a deadly danger had stalked within their midst.

And then I saw another picture. The same line, the same scene, but in this case the officer hesitated to shoot—and was lost. All along the line, spreading with inconceivable rapidity outwards from that broken link, men paused, stopped, caught by the deadly contagion. The line wavered, broke. The attack had failed, because an officer, confronted with a new problem, had hesitated to kill one of his own men.

We are not taught it in the Army. It is an idea we have never had brought home—the mention of the word “funk.” But just as it is easy to mend a small hole in one's pocket if one does it at once, and then it will not grow bigger; and just as it is easy to stop a small hole in a dam if one does it at once, but very hard when it grows bigger, just so is it essential to act, and act at once, if one would prevent the hesitation of one man causing the disaster of hundreds.

It is a problem with which one may never

be confronted, but it is well to give thought to it, for if it should come it will be too late to do so then. And it is not one that can be dismissed lightly, for it goes against the grain to shoot a "pal," and with us officers and men are "pals." But it is not well that any one should forget that men are human, and that there may come a moment when a great and terrible decision must be made, and made *at once*, without a second's hesitation; and if that decision is to be the right one, if hundreds of lives hang in the balance, and what is more, success or failure, the man who fails to arrive at that decision is just as culpable—ay, more so, for his education is greater—as the man who gave out, the rotten link in the chain.

CHAPTER XVI

GOOD-BYE AND GOOD LUCK

It was with quite a heavy heart that I found myself ascending the steps of the house where my disreputable old friend temporarily dwelt, for it was for the last time ; and in this war all good-byes tend to have a feeling of solemnity about them. I found him in front of the open window making violent signals to a parlourmaid in the house opposite ; but as she hastily vanished when she saw me, I did not draw undue attention to his behaviour.

"'Tis yourself, sir," he said, "and it's glad to see you that I am. 'Tis reading I've just been of some French lads who went out one night to the German trenches to cut the wire. Twenty of them there were under a sergeant, and they got right up without being seen. 'Twas cutting they were, when one of them cut the alarm wire, and 'twas all up. They put the search-lights on, and there they were—

absolutely in the soup. In a second they were all killed or wounded, and 'twas lucky for those that were killed, for their end was quick and merciful. But the poor devils who were wounded! Does it not bring a lump to one's throat, sir, to think of them?—for those German swine would neither allow the French to come out and rescue them, nor would they be bothered with the taking of them prisoners themselves.

“For two days and nights they lay there, moaning feebly and trying to bind one another's wounds; and 'twas not killing them even the Germans would be, to end their misery, though they were close to their trenches. They liked to gloat over them, as they died in agony. At last 'twas only the sergeant who was left, and 'twas not far from rest and peace that he was at all. He could hardly move, his limbs were just twitching feebly, when suddenly—'twas just before the end, I suppose—he gathered all his strength together, and his voice rang out through the night. 'Twas the Marseillaise he sang, and as they heard it a great roar of cheers came from the French, and they all took it up with him. 'Twas a great death for a man to die—to go out to such

a tune, like that, with the Germans to hear, and to know that, though death was on you, yet you were a better man than those who had let you die."

"It must be an awful thing to see fellows you know lying wounded in front of you, and not be able to get at them," I said as he paused.

"It is, sir, it is. Sometimes in the morning one will see a great mass of men lying out in front, and some are dead and some are dying, and some are only wounded badly. 'Tis terrible the moaning, and sometimes a man in his agony will give a great heave and a scream and half rise out of a twitching mass of bodies, and then sink back again, exhausted and a little nearer death. And on each side they watch them like a cat watches a mouse. 'Tis not a nice affair—but 'tis no good pretending that this war is anything but hideous. 'Tis perhaps no one's fault—the difficulty of getting in those wounded—because it stands to reason one cannot have them wandering about between the trenches, seeing where sap-heads are, maybe, and getting an idea of the other fellow's trenches and the number of men that he has.

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" But there is one story, sir, that is almost the finest I have ever heard. Maybe you have heard it yourself—but it does not matter, for 'tis a story that bears the telling twice. There were wounded of both sides—us and them—between the trenches, and gradually they had all been brought in. Mistakes had occurred, 'tis true. Each side had plugged the others as they got out to pull them in, but people are jumpy up there, and guns go off quickly—and anyway both sides were equally to blame. They had them all in—all, that is, save one, and he was a German; wounded badly he was, and about half way between the two trenches. One of their lads getting out to bring him in was shot as dead as a door-nail by a lad who was a bit jumpy, and then another one did the same thing. 'Twas bad, but those things will happen. Then suddenly one of our own officers—furious he was with our lads for shooting—he jumps up on the parapet and goes out. The Germans promptly plugged him—but they did not kill him—and he went on steadily straight to the wounded German. Both sides was watching, for they could not understand what was occurring. He reached the Boche and

picks him up, and then he staggers on to the German trenches. And then they understood. 'Twas half out of the trenches both sides was in their excitement, roaring and cheering. He reached the Germans and handed him over to his own lads. Then he saluted; but 'twas not finished yet, for a German officer sprang out, and taking off his own Iron Cross, pinned it on the English officer. The Germans roared and cheered as he saluted again and turned back. 'Twas in the middle half-way back that he lurched forward and fell, only to get up again and stagger on a few paces. Then he fell again, and did not rise, and some of our lads went out to bring him in. 'Twas dead that he was, and when they found it out they took off their hats for a moment, and stood still in the middle between the trenches. And the German officer and some men got up on the parapet to be after showing their respect for a brave man, while they carried him in.

" 'Tis perhaps those little touches of human nature," he went on after a pause, "that save us all from going mad up there. 'Tis terrible the strain, sir. I mind that after that terrible fighting in November, when they came out of

the trenches, 'twas impossible to speak to some of the lads without their bursting out crying. 'Twas their nerves had all gone, and 'tis not I that would be surprised at it. But 'tis a terrible thing to see a great strong man suddenly start to sob like a little child, because you're after asking him the time. 'Tis almost funny it sounds, but 'tis to me the most terrible thing of all—more terrible far than death to look on.

" 'Twas those great shells did it a lot. The concussion if they burst near you was so terrible. It left you dazed like, and 'twas unable to control your hands or your legs at all that you were—trembling all over, and talking gibberish as like as not; and when you see a man like that, 'tis not a sight you will be forgetting.

" I mind me once we were drawn up along a road. All the wagons and carts were there one behind the other, and 'twas myself that was in charge of them for the time being. Suddenly I saw an officer coming down the road; walking fast he was, first on one side and then on the other.

" ' 'Tis a strange appearance he has,' says I to myself, ' and 'tis in a hurry he seems

to be.' With that he reaches the drivers of the first wagon, and asks them something. Terrible excited he was, almost running from one to the other ; and very angry he seemed to be when they were unable to tell him. He goes on to the next wagon and does the same performance all over again ; and when I sees the two first ones talking together and looking at him, I says to myself, I says, 'There's something queer, there is,' I says. "'Tis myself that will be finding out what is the matter at all.'

"So up I goes, and I says to him, 'Can I do anything for you, sir?' I says, 'or what is it at all you would be wanting?'

" "'Tis a sergeant you are,' he says. 'The saints be praised, for 'tis no sense at all I can get from them damn fools,' and he points to the drivers. 'Have you seen my men?' he goes on, 'for 'tis somewhere about here they should be.'

" 'What regiment, sir?' I says, for he was from the trenches, and covered with mud, and 'twas hard to see his badges.

" 'The Pimlico Peashooters,' he says, glaring at me. 'Don't stand there gaping at me like a stuck pig, you fool, or 'tis missing

the train we'll be. 'Tis Margate I have promised to take them to for a bathe, and to eat winkles with a pin.'

"And then one of the men near by started to laugh. 'Shoot that man!' he cries, and draws his revolver. Sure if I had not been quick, he would have done it, and it took three of us to get him quiet again. Then mercifully the doctor-man came up, and all was well. Mad he was, sir, absolutely mad. He thought he'd walked from Berlin, and he didn't even know there was a war on. Poor gentleman, 'tis hoping I am that he is all right again now—but I heard afterwards what had happened. 'Twas blown up the trench had been in which he was, and he was the only one who had escaped. Every man with him, all the other officers, had been blown to pieces, and he had been hurled about twenty yards by the explosion. Stunned he was, of course, and when he recovered his reason had gone. 'Twas a terrible sight to see."

Sergeant Cassidy paused, and a far-away look came over his face. "It's thinking I am, sir," he said, after a pause, "though 'tis not much in my line to say these things—'tis thinking I am that I would not change places

with Kaiser Bill. 'Tis not the dead that will be troubling him at all—not them that are killed clean. But when the end comes, and he goes to join his fathers, will he be liking the burden he has to bear? Will he hear then the groaning curses of men writhing in their death-grip on the plains of Flanders? Will he see then the lads turning their glazing eyes to the Fatherland before they go out into the darkness? Will he live then through the hours when men, turning this way and that, scream to their officers to kill them and put them out of their misery and agony? What will that man feel, I am asking you, sir?

“Will he see the women and the children watching through tearless staring eyes for steps they will never hear again? Will he hear those names—softly muttered through lips already half choked with the life-blood of the speakers—will he hear them, I says, and will they haunt him throughout eternity? I do not know, but I would not be him. 'Tis a sergeant I am, a poor Irishman from Ballygoyle, but as there is a God above, it's frightened I would be to have to face eternity with his little load. 'Twas he who started it—he or his son. I know not which, and faith!

'tis of little matter. But when the time comes and 'tis his time to cross the border, his time to go down the last long Vale, 'tis not alone he will be. Wailing beside him will be the bitter fearful curses of homes he has wrecked, of women, of children, of men writhing in their death-grip. Women left destitute, their men rigid, grinning, with eyes that do not see—children fatherless, mourning for men who went to their death singing the 'Watch on the Rhine.' Drugged they were, and puppets—playthings of the great War Lord. Those curses, sir, will ring in his ears through eternity, till maybe a merciful God will give him oblivion and wipe him out."

"You are right, Cassidy," I said quietly. "God knows the extent of his sin—God will decide the extent of his punishment; but, as you say, I would not be him."

For a space we were silent, and in one's imagination one seemed to hear the zip of the maxims, the drone of the shells carrying on even then the work of death. But such thoughts are not good for soldiers. We are there to fight, not philosophise; to act, not to think.

"I am going in three days, Cassidy," I

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said, as I got up. "Over yonder--with the new lads. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir," he said, getting up, though I tried to prevent him. "We have been together before now, and we know one another. 'Tis good they will be, I know—but 'tis good they must be if they would live up to the reputation we have given them. 'Tis but remnants we have left of our original army, but there has never been anything in this world to beat it—and there never will be again. Good-bye, sir. Good luck."